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Marion's Faith

By the Author of
The Colonel's Daughter

King

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BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER."

CAPT. CHARLES KING, U.S.A.,

AUTHOR OF "KITTY'S CONQUEST," ETC.

PHILADELPHIA:

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TO

The Memory

OF

EMMET CRAWFORD,

CAPTAIN THIRD REGIMENT OF CAVALRY,

ONE OF THE NOBLEST MEN, ONE OF THE KNIGHTLIEST SOLDIERS, AND ONE OF THE MOST INEXCUSABLE SACRIFICES IN THE HISTORY OF OUR ARMY,

THIS STORY

OF SCENES WHEREIN HE WAS LOVED AND HONORED,

IS DEDICATED.

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PREFACE.

THE kind reception accorded "The Colonel's Daughter" was a surprise and delight to the author, nevertheless it was a long time before he could be induced to write this sequel.

When Mr. Sam Slick, at the first essay, shot the cork out of a floating bottle some thirty yards away, he had the deep sagacity never to pull trigger again, well knowing he could not improve on the initial effort, and so Prudence whispered that with the Finis to the story of Jack Truscott and sweet Grace Pelham there had best come a full stop.

But many a plea has been received to "Tell us more about the —th," and at last the motion prevailed. Thackeray has said, "It is an unfair advantage which the novelist takes of the hero and heroine to say good-by to the two as soon as ever they are made husband and wife, and I have often wished that we should hear what occurs to the sober married man as well as to the ardent bachelor; to the matron as to the blushing spinster." And so, many of the characters

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of the old story reappear upon the scene. That they will be welcomed for the sake of auld lang syne has been promised, and that they and their associates may find new interest in the eyes of the indulgent reader is the prayer of

THE AUTHOR.

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MARION'S FAITH.

A SEQUEL TO THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

TWO TROOPERS.

"RAY, what would you do if some one were to leave you a fortune?"

"Humph! Pay for the clothes I have on, I suppose," is the answer, half humorous, half wistful, as the interrogated party, the younger of two officers, glances down at his well-worn regimentals. "That's one reason I'm praying we may be sent to reinforce Crook up in the Sioux country. No need of new duds when you're scouting for old 'Gray Fox,' you know."

"I thought you wanted to take a leave this summer and visit the old home in Kentucky," says the major, with a look of rather kindly interest from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"Want must be my master, then. I couldn't pay my way home if they'd take me as freight," replies the lieutenant, in the downright and devil-may-care style which is one of his several pronounced characteristics. "Of course," he continues presently, "I would like to look in on the mother again; she's getting on in

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years now and isn't over and above strong, but she has no cares or worries to speak of; she don't know what a reprobate I am; sister Nell is married and out of the way; the old home is sold and mother lives in comfort on the proceeds; she's happy up at Lexington with her sister's people. What's the use of my going back to Kentuck and being a worry to her? Before I'd been there a week I'd be spending most of my time down at the track or the stables; I could no more keep away from the horses than I could from a square game, and she hates both,—they swamped my father before I knew an ace from an ant-hill. No, *sir!* The more I think of it the more I know the only place for me is right here with the old regiment. What's more, the livelier work we have in the field and the less we get of garrison grind the better it is for me. I almost wish we were back in Arizona to-day."

"Why, confound it! man, it isn't a year since we left there," breaks in the major, impatiently, "and we haven't begun to get a taste of civilization yet. You let the women in the regiment hear you talk of wanting to go back there, or what's worse, going up to join Crook in Wyoming, and they'll mob you. Who was it your sister married?" he suddenly asks.

"A man named Rallston,—a swell contractor or something up in Iowa. I never saw him; indeed, it's nearly nine years since I saw her; but she promised to be a beauty then, and they all say she grew up a beauty; but Nell was headstrong and always in mischief, and I'm glad she's settled down. She used to write to me when she was first married, four years ago, and send me occasional 'tips' for Christmas and birthdays, and she was

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going to give me a Lexington colt when I came East, but she's quit all that, because I was an ungrateful cub and never answered, I suppose. She knows there's nothing I hate worse than writing, and oughtn't to be hard on me. It's all I can do to send a monthly report to the mother."

"Did you say you never saw her husband?" asks the major after a pause, in which he had been apparently studying the quick-tripping hoofs of Ray's nimble sorrel.

"No; never set eyes on him. It was a sudden smite, —one of those flash-in-the-pan, love-at-first-sight affairs. He was down in Kentucky buying horses, saw her at a party, and made no end of fuss over her; had lots of money and style, you know, and the first I heard of it they were married and off. It was our first year in Arizona, and mails were a month old when they got to us."

"How long is it since you heard from her?" says the major, after another pause.

Mr. Ray looks up in some surprise. He hardly knows what to make of this display of curiosity on the part of his ordinarily indifferent companion, but he answers quietly enough,—

"Over a year, I reckon. She was in Omaha then and Rallston was away a good deal,—had big cattle interests somewhere; I know that mother used to ask if Nell told me much about him, and she seemed anxious. Nell herself said that mother was much opposed to the match,—didn't seem to take to Rallston at all,— but she was bound to have him, and she did, and she's just that high-strung sort of girl that if disappointed

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or unhappy would never let on to the mother as long as she lived."

They are riding slowly in from troop-drill, the battalion commander and a pet of his, Mr. Ray, of the —th Cavalry. It is one of those exquisite May mornings when the rolling prairies of Western Kansas seem swimming in a soft, hazy light, and the *mirage* on the horizon looks like a glassy sea. The springy turf is tinted with the hues of myriads of wild flowers, purple, pale blue, and creamy white; the mountain breeze that is already whirling the dust-clouds on the Denver plains has not yet begun to ruffle the cottonwoods or the placid surface of the slow-moving stream, and in many a sheltered pool the waters of the "Smoky Hill" gleam like silvered mirror, without break or flaw. Far out on the gentle slopes small herds of troop-horses or quartermaster's "stock," each with its attendant guard, give life to the somewhat sombre tone of the landscape, while nearer at hand two or three well-filled cavalry "troops" with fluttering guidons are marching silently in towards the little frontier garrison that lies in a shallow dip in the wide, treeless prairie.

Bits of color are rare enough, save the faint hues of the flowerets,—almost as indistinguishable in the general effect as their fairy fragrance on the air. Aloft, the sky is all one blaze of sunshine, that seems to bleach it into palest, most translucent blue. Far to the west some fleecy clouds are rolling up from the horizon, wafted from the peaks of the hidden Rockies. Down in the "swale," the wooden barracks, stables, quarters, and storehouses are all one tint of economical brown, brightened only by the hues of the flag that hangs high

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over the scene. Beyond the shallow valley and across the stream, looking only long rifle-shot away, but a good two miles when one comes to walk it, a brick school-house with glistening cupola stands sentinel in the centre of the scattering frontier town; there, too, lies the railway station, from which an ugly brown freight-train is just pulling out Denverwards, puffing dense clouds of inky smoke to the sky. Space, light, and air there are in lavish profusion. Shade there is little or none, except close along the winding stream; but shade is a thing neither sought nor cared for, as the sun-tanned faces of the troopers show. Every now and then a trumpet-call floats softly over the prairie, or the ringing, prolonged word of command marks some lazily-executed manœuvre on the homeward way. Drill is over; the sharp eyes and sharper tongue of the major no longer criticise any faulty or "slouchy" wheel; the drill proper has been stiff and spirited, and now the necessary changes of direction are carried out in a purely perfunctory manner, while the battalion commander and his subaltern, troops and all, amble back and give their steeds a breathing spell.

Typical cavalrymen are those two, who, chatting quietly together, are riding somewhat in advance of the returning companies. The major is a man a trifle over forty, short, stout, with massive shoulders, chest, and thighs, a neck like a bull, a well-shaped head covered with straight, close-cropped, brown hair, innocent of kink or curl; a florid face, bronzed and tanned by years of life in sun and wind and storm; clean-shaven but for the drooping brown moustache that conceals the rugged lines of his mouth, and twinkling blue-gray

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eyes that peer out with searching gaze from under their shaggy brows. Firmness, strength, self-reliance, even sternness, can be read in every line; but around the gathering crowsfeet at the corners of his eyes, and lurking under the shadow of the grim moustache, are little curves or dimples or something, that betray to the initiated the presence of a humorous vein that softens the asperity of the soldier. Some who best know him can detect there a symptom of tenderness and a possibility of sentiment, whose existence the major would indignantly deny. The erect carriage of the head, the square set of the shoulders, the firm yet easy seat in the saddle, speak of the experienced soldier, while in the first word that falls from his lips one hears the tone of the man far more at home in camp than court. There is something utterly blunt and abrupt in his manner, a scathing contrast to the affected drawl brought into the regiment by recent importations from the East, and assiduously copied by a professed Anglomaniac among the captains. Rude indeed may he sometimes be in his speech, "and little versed in the set phrase of peace," but through it all is the ring of sturdy honesty and independence. He uses the same tone to general and to private soldier alike, extending the same degree of courtesy to each. No one ever heard of "old Stannard's" fawning upon a superior or bullying an inferior; to all soldiers he is one and the same,—short, blunt, quick, and to the point. Literally he obeys the orders of his chiefs, and literally and promptly he expects his own to be obeyed. He has his faults, like the best of men: he will growl at times; he is prone to pick flaws, and to say sharp and cutting

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things, for which he is often ashamed and sorry; he can see little good in the works or words of the men he dislikes; he absolutely cannot praise, and he is over-quick to blame; but after all he is true as steel, as unswerving as the needle, and no man, no woman could need a stancher friend than the new major of the —th, "old Stannard."

As for Ray, no officer in the regiment is better known or more talked about. Ten years of his life he has spent under the standard of the —th, barring a very short but eventful detail at "the Point." Nebraska, Kansas, and Arizona he knows as well as the savannas of his native blue-grass country. He has been in more skirmishes with the regiment and more scrapes of his own than any fellow of his age in service, but he has the faculty of "lighting on his feet every time," as he himself would express it, and to-day he rides along as buoyantly and recklessly as he did ten years ago, and the saddle is Ray's home. Ephemeral pleasure he finds in the hop-room, for he dances well; perennial attraction, his detractors say, he finds at the card-table, but Ray is never quite himself until he throws his leg over the horse he loves. He is *facile princeps* the light rider of the regiment, and to this claim there are none to say him nay. A tip-top soldier too is Ray. Keen on the scout, tireless on the trail, daring to a fault in action, and either preternaturally cool or enthusiastically excited when under fire. He is a man the rank and file swear by and love. "You never hear Loot'nant Ray saying 'Go in there, fellers.' 'Tis always, 'Come on, boys.' That's why I like him," is the way Sergeant Moriarty puts it. Among his comrades, his brother

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officers that is to say, opinions are divided. Ray has trusty friends and he has his bitter enemies, though the latter, when charged with the fact, are prone to say that no one is so much Ray's enemy as Ray himself,—an assertion which cannot be altogether denied. But as his own worst enemy Ray is thoroughly open and above-board; he has not a hidden fault; his sins are many and they are public property for all he cares; whereas the men who dislike Ray in the regiment are of the opposite stamp. Among themselves they pick him to pieces with comparative safety, but outside their limited circle, the damnation of faint praise, the covert insinuations, or that intangible species of backbiting which can,

"Without sneering, others teach to sneer,"

has to be their resort, and for good reason. Ray tolerates no slander, and let him once get wind of the fact that some man has maligned him, there is a row in the camp. Minding his own business, however unsuccessfully, he meddles with the affairs of no one else, and thinking twice before he alludes once to the shortcomings of a comrade, he claims that consideration for himself, but doesn't get it. There be men who outrival the weaker sex in the sinister effect they can throw into the faintest allusion to another's conduct, and in the dexterity with which they evade the consequences, and of such specimens the —th has its share. There was Crane, whom Ray had fearfully snubbed and afterwards "cut" in Arizona; there was Wilkins, whom Ray had treated with scant courtesy for over a year, because of some gossip that veteran had been instrumental in putting

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into circulation; there was Captain Canker, who used to like and admire Ray in the rough old days in the cañons and deserts, but who had forfeited his esteem while they were stationed at Camp Sandy, and when they met again in Kansas, Ray touched his cap to his superior officer but withheld his hand. Canker felt very bitterly towards Ray, claiming that there was no officer in the regiment whom he had treated with such marked courtesy, and to this, when he heard it, Ray made response in his characteristic way. He would have no middleman. He went straight to Canker and said his say in few terse words: "You consider me unjustified in refusing to treat you as a friend, Captain Canker; now let us have no misunderstanding whatever. Your conduct towards *my* best friend, Captain Truscott, and towards—towards another good friend of mine at Sandy, was an outrage in my opinion, and I have yet to learn that you have expressed regret or made amends. That's my position, sir; and if you care for my friendship, you know how to regain it." Canker was too much astonished by such directness to make any reply. Other officers who happened to be standing near maintained an embarrassed silence, and Ray faced about and walked off. "For all the world," said Wilkins, "as though he had that d—d chip on his shoulder again and was begging somebody to knock it off." Canker was hit in a sore place. Long before this occurrence he realized that several officers of the regiment had withdrawn every semblance of esteem in their intercourse with him. He well knew why, but the officer whose cause Ray so vehemently championed was away on detached service, and Canker really did not know just

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what to do, and was too proud and sensitive to seek advice. He was a gallant soldier in the field, but a man of singularly unfortunate disposition,—crabbed, cranky, and suspicious; and thus it resulted that he, too, joined the little band of Ray haters, despite the fact that he felt ashamed of himself for so doing.

Then there was Gleason,—"That man Gleason," as he was generally alluded to, and to those familiar with army life or army ways the mere style is indicative of his character. For good and sufficient reason Mr. Ray had slapped Mr. Gleason's face some years back, when the —th was serving in Arizona, and there was no possible reason for his failure to seek the immediate reparation due him as an officer, no possible reason except the absolute certainty of Ray's promptly according him the demanded luxury. The —th was commanded by a colonel of the old school in those days, one who had observed "the code" when a junior officer, and would have been glad to see it carried out to this day; but Gleason was not made of that stuff, and to the scandal of the regiment and the incredulous mirth of Mr. Ray, Gleason pocketed the blow as complacently as he did the money he had won from the Kentuckian by a trick which was transparent to every looker-on, and would have been harmless with Ray—had he been himself. Those were the rough days of the regiment's campaign against the Apaches; officers and men were scattered in small commands through the mountains; in the general and absorbing interest of the chase and scout after a common foe there was no time to take up and settle the affair as something affecting the credit of the entire corps; many officers never heard of it at all until long

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afterwards, and then it was too late; but to this day Gleason stood an unsparing, bitter, but secret and treacherous enemy of the younger officer. He hated Ray with the venom of a snake.

So far as the regiment was concerned, the enmity of a man of Gleason's calibre could hardly be of consequence. Like Canker, he had come into the —th from the "supernumerary list" at the time of the general reorganization in '71. Scores of infantry officers left out of their regiments by consolidation were saddled upon the cavalry and artillery, and in many instances proved utterly out of their element in the mounted service. All the cavalry regiments growled more or less at the enforced addition to their list of "total commissioned," and the —th had not been especially fortunate. Many a fine soldier and excellent comrade had come into the cavalry in this way, and of them the —th had found a few; but a dozen or more, valuable neither as soldiers nor comrades, had drifted into the mounted service, and of these the regiment had, to say the least, its full share. "All I've got to remark on the subject," said old "Black Bill," the senior major at that eventful period,—"all I've got to remark is simply this: those infantry fellows showed profound discrimination in getting rid of their chaff, but they had no mercy on us. When a man ain't good enough for a doughboy officer he ain't fit for anything."

Now, it by no means resulted from inefficiency on their part that so many of the transferred officers had left their own regiments. Many had requested the move; many more were rendered supernumerary as being the juniors of their grades; but there were

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others still who ranked well up in their old regiments, and yet were mysteriously "left out in the cold." And of such was "that man Gleason." Six years had he served with the new regiment in the field, and not a friend could he muster among the officers,—not one who either liked or respected him,—not one who more than tolerated him except among the two or three who daily and nightly haunted the card-room at the trader's store; but to hear Gleason talk one would fancy him to be on terms of intimacy with every "solid" man of the regiment, and the casual visitor at the garrison would be more than apt to leave it with the impression that Gleason was the figure-head of the commissioned element. He had fair manners; his appearance was prepossessing; he was bland and insinuating among daily associates, confidential and hospitable with strangers. A visitor could go nowhere without meeting Gleason, for his social status was just so balanced between adverse influences that one could neither forbid nor welcome him to his home. No matter who might be the entertaining officer, the first to call and pay his respects to the guest would be that objectionable Gleason, and very sprightly and interesting could he be. Ten to one the chances were that when he took his departure he had left a pleasant impression on the mind of the new arrival, who would find himself at a loss to account for the evident perturbation with which his host proper regarded his acceptance of Gleason's hospitable invitations. Gleason's horse, Gleason's dogs or guns or rods were promptly at the door for him to try, and when others sought to do him honor, and other invitations came to hunt or ride or dine, Gleason had the inside

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track, and somehow or other it seemed to make the better men of the —th retire into their shells when they heard of it. This had been the way with visiting officers from other posts and regiments when in Arizona, and the same thing was being repeated here in Kansas. The —th did not like it, but could not exactly see how to help it. The only vulnerable and tangible points upon which he could be "sent to Coventry" were shady transactions at cards or horse-racing that had occurred in Arizona, and his failure to resent Ray's blow; but two and three years had elapsed since these occurrences; the scattered condition of the command had prevented regimental notice of them at the time, and it was generally held that now it was too late for any such action. With any other man coldness, distance of manner, or at the least the pronounced snubs that greeted Gleason, would have long since had effect, but he was proof against such methods, and no sooner detected them than he found excuses to force himself upon the attention or conversation of the officer, and in so insidious a way as to disarm resistance. He would fairly beam with cordiality and respect upon the commanding officer who was short and gruff with him; he would invade old Stannard's quarters to ask his advice about the purchase of a horse or the proper method of dealing with some one of his men,—and the major had a soft side in looking after the rights of the rank and file; he would drop in to ask Mrs. Stannard the name of a new flower he had picked up out near the targets. He cared no more for flowers than she did for him, but it gave him temporary admission, generally when other ladies had called for a morning chat, and though she cordially

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disliked him, Mrs. Stannard was too thorough a lady to show the least discourtesy to an officer of her husband's regiment. Gleason well knew it, and laid his plans accordingly. For a long time, indeed, there were ladies who could not understand why Mr. Gleason should be so contemptuously spoken of by the officers. He was so thoughtful, so delicate, and then he was so lonely. Gleason was a widower, whose eyes would often overflow when he spoke of the little woman whom he had buried years ago down in Connecticut; but when Mrs. Turner once questioned Captain Baxter, who knew them when they were in the old infantry regiment in Louisiana, and referred to its being so sad and touching to hear Mr. Gleason talk of his dead wife and their happy days among the orange-groves near Jackson Barracks, the captain astonished her by an outburst of derisive laughter. "Happy, madam?" said he; "by gad! if ever a woman died of neglect, abuse, and ill-treatment Mrs. Gleason did, and next time he attempts to gull you with sentiment, just you refer him to me." But then, as Mrs. Turner said, poor Captain Baxter's finer sensibilities seemed to have been blunted by a lifetime in the quartermaster's department, and for quite a while Mr. Gleason was one of her favorites,—quite a devotee in fact, until the disastrous day when she discovered that so far from having been ill and unable to ride with her, as he claimed, he had been spending the afternoon in the fascinations of poker. One by one the ladies of the —th had learned to trust Mr. Gleason as little as did their lords, but there was no snubbing him. "Snubs," said the senior major, "are lost on such a pachydermatous ass as Gleason,"

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and however tough might be his moral hide, and however deserved might have been the applied adjective, the major was in error in calling Gleason an ass. Intriguing, full of low malice and scheming, a "slanderer and substractor" he certainly was, but no fool. More's the pity, Mr. Gleason was far too smart for the direct methods and simple minds of his associates in the —th. He never in all his life failed to take full note of every slight or coldness, and though it was his rôle to hide the sting, and "smile and smile and be a villain," never was it his purpose to permit the faintest snub to go unpunished. Sooner or later, unrelentingly but secretly he would return that stab with interest ten times compounded. And sooner or later to the bitter end he meant to feed fat his ancient grudge on Ray.

Up to this time he had scant opportunity. For two or three years preceding their removal to the East Gleason had been stationed in Southern Arizona, while Ray, after months of lively service in the mountains, had been sent to regimental headquarters, and marched with them when they came into Kansas. Now once more six companies were gathered at the post of the standard,—two were tenting on the prairie just outside the garrison, the other four were regularly in barracks, and the concentration there boded a move or "business" of some kind. "Old Catnip," the colonel, was East, but the lieutenant-colonel was commanding, and the junior major was there. Drills were incessant, but scouts were few, and after the years of "go-as-you-please" work in Arizona the —th was getting rapidly back into soldierly shape. The little frontier fort was

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blithe and gay with its merry populace. All the officers' families had joined; several young ladies were spending the spring in garrison and taking their first taste of military life; hops and dances came off almost every night, a "german" every week; rides, drives, hunts, and picnic-parties were of daily occurrence; the young officers were in clover, the young ladies in ecstasy, the young matrons—perhaps not quite so well pleased as when they had the field to themselves in Arizona, where young ladies had been few and far between, and all promised delightfully for the coming summer,—all but the war-cloud rising in the far Northwest.

CHAPTER II.

GARRISON TALK.

It was a picturesque group that assembled every pleasant morning on the veranda of the colonel's quarters. There had been a time in the not very distant past of the regiment when the ladies gathered almost anywhere else in preference, but that was when Colonel Pelham had retained the command, and when his wife sought to rule the garrison after methods of her own devising. However successful may be such feminine usurpation for a time, it is at best but a temporary power, for women are of all things revolutionary. The instances where some ambitious matron has sought to assume the control of the little military

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bailiwick known as "the garrison" are numerous indeed, but the fingers of one hand are too many to keep tally of the cases of prolonged and peaceful reign. Mrs. Pelham's queendom had been limited to a very brief fortnight,—so 'twas said in the regiment,—despite the fact that the more prominent members of the social circle of the —th had been quite ready to do her every homage on her first arrival,—provided the prime ministry were not given to some rival sister. But Mrs. Pelham's administration had been fraught with errors and disasters enough to wreck a constitutional monarchy, and, as a result, affairs were in a highly socialistic, if not nihilistic condition for some months after the return of the regiment from its exile in Arizona. Only a few of the officers had taken their families thither with them, for the journey in those days was full of vast discomfort and expense, and life there was an isolation; but those ladies who had shared with their lords the heat and burden of the Arizona days were not unnaturally given to regarding themselves as entitled to more consideration as regimental authorities than those of their sisterhood who had remained in comfort in the East. Then, too, there was a little band of heroines who had made the march "cross country" with the —th, and held themselves (and were held by the men) as having a higher place on the regimental unwritten records than those who were sent home by way of the Pacific, San Francisco, and the one railway that then belted the continent. Of these heroines Mrs. Pelham was not, and when she rejoined at Fort Hays, got her house in order and proceeded, though with inward misgiving, to summon her subjects about

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her, she found that even the faint rally on which she had counted was denied her. The ladies who knew her at Camp Sandy had thrown off the yoke, and those who were joining for the first time had been unmistakably cautioned by the determined Amazons of the homeward march. Courtesy, civility, and a certain degree of cordiality when in their social gatherings, the ladies were willing to extend to the colonel's wife, but the declaration of independence had been signed and sealed,—they would have no more of her dominion.

To a woman of her character garrison life was no longer tolerable to Mrs. Pelham; the colonel, too, was getting tired of it, was aging rapidly and no longer able to take his morning gallops. Then, too, he was utterly lonely; his one daughter, the light of his old eyes, had married the man of her choice during the previous year; his sons were scattered in their own avocations, and the complaints and peevishness of his wife were poor companions for his fireside. The officers welcomed him to their club-room and gladly strove to interest him in billiards or whist, to the exclusion of the Gleason clique and concomitant poker which was never played in the colonel's presence; but even this solace was denied him by his wife. She was just as lonely at home, poor lady, and she had to have some one to listen to her long accumulation of feminine trials and grievances, otherwise the overcharged bosom would burst. We claim it an attribute of manhood that "to suffer and be strong" is an every-day affair; but the best of men feel infinite relief in having some trusted friend who will listen in patience to the oft-told story of their struggle. To suffer, be strong,

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and be silent is a task for the stoutest of our sex, but woman triumphs over nature itself in accomplishing the triple feat, and undergoes a torture that outrivals martyrdom. Suffer Mrs. Pelham could and did, if her voluble lamentations could be credited; strong she deemed herself beyond all question, in not having succumbed to the privations and asperities of Western life, but silent? ah, no! Poor old Pelham's life had become a perennial curtain-lecture, so Lieutenant Blake expressed it, and when January came, and with it an opportunity to accept a pleasant detail in the East, the colonel lost no time in taking his departure. He left the —th with a sorrowful heart, for officers and men were strongly attached to the old soldier who had for years past shared every exile with them, but they could not bear his domineering wife, and many a fellow who hadn't told an appreciable lie for six months gulped unconscionably when it came to saying good-by to Mrs. Pelham. How could an honest man say he regretted her going? Stout old Bucketts, the quartermaster, looked her straight in the eye and wished her a pleasant journey and a long and happy visit East, whereat several ladies gasped audibly, yet told it over and over afterwards with infinite delight. The majority of the officers contented themselves with saying that the garrison would not be the same place without the colonel and herself, which was gospel truth despite its ambiguity, but Gleason came in from a hunt purposely to say farewell, and was most effusive in his regrets at her ladyship's departure, and as for the ladies of the regiment. Ah, well! Why should they be any different, any more frank in garrison than out of it? There was

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not one of their number who did not inwardly rejoice at Mrs. Pelham's going, but they clouded their gentle faces in decorous mourning; they grouped about her on the piazza when the hour for parting came, looking infinitely pathetic and picturesque, and the soft voices were touching in their subdued sorrow; there were even eyes that glistened with unshed tears, and both Mrs. Raymond and Mrs. Turner begged that she would write to them, and heaven only knows what all. Who that saw it could doubt the forgiving nature of the gentler sex? Who dare asperse the sweet sincerity of feminine friendship?

But Lady Pelham had gone, and gone for good they hoped; the lieutenant-colonel had arrived and assumed command, and Major and Mrs. Stannard made their first appearance at regimental headquarters. A new era had dawned on the —th; the staff sent in their resignations, and were promptly and pleasantly notified by the new commander that he hoped they would not deprive him of services that had been so valuable to his predecessor; whereat they resumed duty with lighter hearts. It was all well enough where Bucketts was concerned; he had been quartermaster for years and no one expected anything else, but there were those in the regiment who hoped there might be a change in the adjutancy. The office was held by one of the senior lieutenants, to be sure, and one who possessed many qualifications which were conceded, but his appointment had been something of an accident.

He, too, had come into the —th by transfer in '71 for the avowed purpose of seeking service on the Western frontier with the cavalry. As it was the

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artillery which he abandoned for that purpose, the —th admitted that here was a fellow who might be worth having, but, to the scandal of the entire regiment, no sooner was the order issued which doomed them to a five years' exile in Arizona—then overrun with hostile Apaches—than the newly transferred gentleman accepted a detail as aide-de-camp on the staff of a general officer, and the —th went across to the Pacific and presently were lost to recollection in the then inaccessible wilds of that marvellous Territory. Here they spent four long years of hard scouting, hard fighting, and no little suffering, while the aide in question was presumably enjoying himself in unlimited ball and opera in a gay Southern capital. Suddenly he turned up in their midst just in time to take part in the closing campaign which left the Apaches for several years a disarmed and subjugated race; he happened to get command of a well-seasoned and thoroughly experienced "troop," and through no particular personal merit, but rather by the faculty he had of seeking the advice of the veteran sergeants in the company, he had won two or three lively little fights with wandering bands of hostiles, and had finally been quite enviably wounded. It was all a piece of his confounded luck, said some of the —th not unnaturally. Many a gallant fellow had been killed and buried, many another wounded and not especially mentioned, and all of them had done months of hard work where Billings had put in only so many days, but here he came in at the eleventh hour, and they, who had borne the heat and burden of the campaign and received every man his penny, couldn't help a few good-

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natured slings at the fact that Billings's penny was just as big and round as theirs. The department commander had been close at hand every time that fortunate youth came in from a scout, and even Ray, who was incessantly seeking the roughest and most dangerous service, could not repress a wistful expression of his views when he heard of the final scrimmage far up towards Chevelon's Fork. "Here we fellows have been bucking against this game for nigh onto four years now, and if ever we raked in a pile it's all been ante'd up since, and now Billings comes in fresh—never draws but he gets a full hand—and he scoops the deck. He has too much luck for a white man." The remark was one that, said by Ray himself in his whimsical and downright manner, was destitute of any hidden meaning, and Billings, who had not seen Ray for years, would never have misunderstood it, but when he first heard it six months afterwards, and while Ray and himself had yet to meet, it was told semi-confidentially, told as Ray never said it, told in fact—by Gleason; and Billings, who was of a nervous, sensitive disposition, as outspoken in a way as Ray was in his, was hurt more than a little. He had known Ray a dozen years before when both were wearing the gray as cadets at the Point, but they were in different classes and by no means intimate. Each, however, had cordially liked the other, and Billings would have been slow to believe the statement as told him for a single instant except for two things,—one was that Gleason was a new acquaintance of whom up to that time he knew nothing really discreditable; the other was that just before the regiment came East from Arizona the adjutancy became

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vacant, Lieutenant Truscott, who had long held the position, was detailed for duty at West Point and speedily promoted to his captaincy; Billings was brought in wounded and sent off by sea to San Francisco as soon as he could travel, and so heard little of the particulars of some strange mystery that was going on at regimental headquarters, and when, some months later, he rejoined the regiment in Kansas, it was with much mental perturbation that he received from "Old Catnip" the offer of the still vacant adjutancy.

Of course, he had heard by that time just why Truscott had resigned and refused to re-accept the position; he also knew that the colonel had said that he could give it to no officer who had not served with them in the rough days in Arizona; and, moreover, that he had once declared that offering the adjutancy to a second lieutenant was equivalent to saying that no first lieutenant was capable of performing the duties. But he did not know that soon after Truscott's resignation the colonel had tendered the adjutancy to Ray, and that impolitic youth had promptly declined. He knew, as did the whole regiment, that for Truscott Ray had an enthusiastic admiration and regard, and for that matter, Billings himself had reason to look upon the ex-adjutant as a friend worth having; but he did not suspect, as some at old Camp Sandy more than suspected, that Ray had been offered his place. The colonel, in his surprise and mortification, would speak of it to no one. Ray, in his blunt honesty, conceived it to be his duty to regard the offer as confidential, since he *had* declined, and so, snubbed any one who strove to extract information. Most of the senior lieutenants

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were on detached service when they came in from Arizona. Everybody thought Stryker would get the detail as soon as he returned from abroad, whither he had gone on leave after making, as mountain scout leader, the best four years' record in the regiment; but Stryker came just as Billings did, and to Billings, not Stryker, was the adjutancy tendered. What made the regiment indignant was, that so far from being in the least put out about it, Stryker placidly remarked that Billings was the very man for the place. "He isn't entitled to it," said the —th; "in ten years' service he hasn't spent ten months with us." But Stryker did not see fit to tell them what he knew and the colonel knew,—that he had been tendered and had accepted the position of aide-de-camp to his old Arizona chief, and was daily awaiting orders to join; and Ray was off scouting with his troop when Billings reached headquarters, and had to face, as he supposed, an opposition. Stannard was the only man who really knew very much about him as a cavalry officer, and Stannard's opinion was what brought it all about. They had served for some months at the same post, and both the major and his clear-sighted wife had taken a fancy to the young officer, whose first appearance in "citified garb and a *pince-nez*" gave little promise of future usefulness in the field. Pelham and Stannard knew that it *had* to be Billings or a second lieutenant, but Billings had at first no such intimation. Possibly his strong sense of self-esteem might have stood in the way of acceptance had he supposed that he was merely a last resort. Stannard really hoped he would be the appointee, but all he would say to the colonel when asked for his opinion

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was, "I have had less to find fault with in him than any officer who ever served in my troop; but then he was only with me six months or so. *I* like him," which was tantamount to saying others probably wouldn't. But Stannard and Billings were firm friends, as anybody could see, and the colonel was quick to note that when Stannard had given Billings anything to do, he bothered himself no further about the matter, instead of going along and supervising as was his wont with most of the others. "If he's good enough for Stannard, he'll do for me," was the colonel's comment, and when Billings sought to decline the appointment offered, hinting, with well-meant but awkward delicacy, that perhaps it ought to go to some man of more established reputation and record in the regiment, the colonel cut him short with, "Here, Mr. Billings, I must have some one at once; old Bucketts has been doing office-work as both quartermaster and adjutant until he is getting used up, and young Dana is only good for parade and guard-mounting. I'll detail you as acting adjutant, and if you like it, at the end of a week we'll make the appointment permanent. Consult your friends meantime, if you choose." And so it happened that when Stannard said, "Take it," and Stryker told him quietly that there were reasons why he himself would have had to decline, Billings shook his head a few minutes in thinking over what he had heard of Mrs. Pelham, and wished he might see Ray and make him understand that he thought the place should go to him, but Stannard said, emphatically, that Ray was too harum-scarum for office-work, good as he was in the field. And then came a brief letter from

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Truscott, cordial and straight to the point as ever. It wound up by saying, "The colonel attributes your hesitation to the fact that you think it ought to go to some man who has served longer with the regiment. We respect that, and appreciate it; but you are offered this with the best backing in the regiment,—Stannard's,—and with that you can afford to laugh at anything the growlers may say."

The next morning the order was issued in due form. That afternoon Mr. Ray, returning dusty and unshorn from a two weeks' scout up the Saline, was informed of the fact as he stood at the stables unstrapping from the back of his sorrel the carcass of a fat antelope, gave a low whistle, remarked, "Well, I'm damned!" and, as bad luck would have it, postponed rushing in to congratulate Billings until dinner, when, to his genuine disappointment, the latter did not appear. He was dining at the colonel's to meet some officers from Leavenworth, and when the new adjutant went to his rooms late that night he had not seen Ray at all, but there was that man Gleason smoking a cigar, sipping a toddy, and evidently primed for a chat. Already Billings had begun to look upon him with disfavor, but could find no reason to avoid him entirely; he did not welcome the unwanted guest; he could not chill him. Gleason had his chat, and, when Ray stepped forward with sunny smile and glistening white teeth and cordial, outstretched hand the next morning, Billings looked him in the eye, took his hand, but there was no warmth in the welcome, and Ray felt rebuffed. "I heard Ned Billings had developed into something of a snob," said he afterwards, "but he's changed more, for a frank-hearted fellow that

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he was ten years ago, than any man I know." And so it happened that two men whose lives were closely interwoven from that time on, who had much in common, who, "had they but known," could never have drifted apart, began the next stage with an unknown, unseen, yet undeniable influence thrusting them asunder. And it was of these two men that the picturesque group on the colonel's piazza happened to be speaking this very May morning as the major and Mr. Ray, dismounting at the south gate, strolled lazily up the road. It was the habit of the former when not on military duty to thrust his hands deep down into his trousers pockets, and allow his ample and aldermanic paunch to repose its weight upon his sabre-belt. As the belt was worn only at the hours of drill or parade, it followed that there were lapses of time wherein the paunch knew no such military trammel, and a side elevation of the battalion commander warranted the simile put in circulation by Lieutenant Blake: "The major looked as though he had swallowed a drum." Ray, on the contrary, was slimly, even elegantly built, a trifle taller than his bulky superior, and though indolent in his general movements, excitement or action transformed him in an instant. Then in every motion he was quick as a cat. It was his wont to wear his forage-cap far down over his forehead and canted very much over the right eye, while, contrary to the fashion of that day, his dark hair fell below the visor in a sweeping and decided "bang" almost to his eyebrows, which were thick, dark brown, and low-arched. A semi-defiant backward toss of the head was the result as much perhaps of the method of wearing his cap as of any pronounced mental character-

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istic. When Stannard was talking eagerly of any subject his hands went deeper into his pockets, his head thrust forward, and his eyes fairly popped, as though slight additional pressure would project them into space like many-tinted grape-shot. If he were standing still, he tilted on his toes and dropped his head to one side as he expounded, until the ear wellnigh reposed upon the shoulder-strap. Ray, on the other hand, threw his head farther back and, unless he was angry, showed his white teeth to the molars.

As they came along the walk from the main gate and passed one by one the snug little brown cottages known as the officers' quarters, the ladies grouped on the colonel's piazza began their very natural comment,—there were no other men in sight on that side of the garrison.

"Last year you never saw Major Stannard without Mr. Billings; now you never see him with him, and he is just as chummy with Mr. Ray," remarked our old friend Mrs. Turner, who was languidly swinging in the hammock, her eyes commanding a view of the sidewalk, and the sidewalk commanding a view of her very presentable feet encased in a new pair of French heeled slippers, and stockings whose delicate mauve tint matched the ribbons of her airy dress.

"Well, Mr. Billings is adjutant and cooped up in the office all day," was the reply of Mrs. Raymond, who could readily find reason for taking exception to the remarks or theories of her next-door neighbor and social rival.

There were five ladies in the group, all under thirty, two of them under twenty, only one unmarried, none of them avowedly interested in either of the two offi-

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cers slowly approaching. No one of them, however, neglected a sweeping glance at her draperies or some slight readjustment of pose or petticoat. Possibly the formality would have been equally observed had they all been over fifty.

"I never could understand why Mr. Billings was made adjutant," remarked the one spinster, her eyes dreamily resting on the lithe form of Mr. Ray. "I don't mean, of course, that he doesn't do very well, but —there were so many others who would have—at least who deserved it so much more."

"Well, you must remember this," responded Mrs. Turner, "there wasn't anybody else when it was given to him, and there was no real reason why the colonel should remove him when he took command. Mr. Stryker was going as aide-de-camp; Mr. Gleason—well, anybody knows he wouldn't do; Mr. Crane and Mr. Wilkins were neither of them fit for it; Mr. Ray wouldn't have it, and Mr. Blake and Mr. Freeman hadn't joined. It was really Billings or nobody, except, of course, the second lieutenants. Dear me! how I wish one of them could have been appointed!" And Mrs. Turner sighed pathetically. The younger officers were her especial henchmen, and each in turn paid his devotion a year or more at the shrine. If any one of them had been put in power, how much easier 'twould have been to get the band every evening! and then the hops wouldn't have to close at midnight either! and Mrs. Turner was devoted to dancing.

"But papa says Mr. Billings is right about not letting the band play after midnight," broke in the young lady, whose years had been spent in many a garrison,

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and whose papa—the post surgeon—had pronounced views on matters of military and medical discipline. "Papa says the officers have no right to make the band play until late at night unless they pay them extra. They have to be up at reveille, and it's a shame to make them work all day and at night too!"

"The doctor is by no means alone in that idea," began a third speaker in a quiet voice, and both Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Raymond, who had impulsively burst into speech at the same instant, checked their nimble tongues, bridled, sweetly said, "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Stannard," and inclined attentive ears to a lady who at the moment had stepped from the open door-way to the piazza. It was evident that she was a late arrival, in whose presence the others felt bound to observe the deferential manners which further intimacy would possibly extinguish. "Indeed," she went on, "only this morning at breakfast Colonel Foster was saying that the bandsmen were getting their full share of work, and that Mr. Billings was quite right in the stand he made in the matter."

"Ah, Mrs. Stannard, I don't wonder Mr. Billings is devoted to you!" said Mrs. Raymond. "You are always ready to defend him."

"He was in our troop, you know, and I feel that he belongs to us to a certain extent," said Mrs. Stannard, smiling brightly, and nodding pleasant greetings to the two officers who were passing at the moment, still intent in their earnest talk. The major merely glanced at the piazza and pulled off his cap, as though he wished its fair occupants were beyond saluting distance. Ray bowed with laughing grace, and sung out cheerily,—

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"Don't expect the major home just yet, Mrs. Stannard; he's giving me fits, and I'm in for a lecture."

The ladies were silent a moment, until the pair had passed on out of earshoot. Then Mrs. Turner took up the cudgels again.

"And yet, Mrs. Stannard, it wasn't so when Mr. Truscott was adjutant. We could have the band night after night if we wanted to, and surely you won't say that Mr. Truscott wasn't the very paragon of an adjutant."

"No, indeed," was the reply. "We all know how unequalled Mr. Truscott was; but then, were not the conditions very different, Mrs. Turner? For instance, in Arizona the band was not mounted, the men had no stable duty, and it was so hot in the daytime that they really had no duty to perform but to play after dark when it was cool. Now, here they have their horses, they have two parades each day; they practice every morning, and play on the parade every afternoon; that, with morning and evening stable duty, keeps them very busy, and don't you think Mr. Billings is right?"

Now, all this was well understood by both Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Turner's friends, and as put by Mrs. Stannard, the case was clearly in favor of the bandsmen and the adjutant. Down in the depths of her consciousness Mrs. Turner was well aware of the fact. She had gone over the fight with her liege lord, the captain, more than once since the spring weather had set in and the services of the band were in requisition several hours each day. She knew perfectly well that there was no parallel in the conditions existing in Arizona in Mr. Truscott's time and those of the day in

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Kansas with Billings. Still, she wanted to contrast the men and their methods, and, as is not unusual, pronounced the abstract statement that "it wasn't so with Mr. Truscott. *Then* we could have the band night after night." She was only stating a fact, was her mental justification, but that she was doing an injustice she would probably have not admitted for an instant.

Mrs. Stannard, however, had seen through the argument, and in her courteous way had shattered its effect. This put Mrs. Turner on her mettle, and she half rose from the hammock.

"Don't for a moment think I mean to criticise Mr. Billings, Mrs. Stannard; I really like him, *very* much; only it's so poky not to have the band now. The evenings are so lovely for dancing, and with so many young officers here, it seems such a pity to waste so much time. They are out drilling or shooting, or something, all day long, and who knows but what they'll all be ordered off somewhere the next minute? Then we can have the band all day and nobody to dance with. It's always the way."

"Well, I like Mr. Billings, too," said Mrs. Raymond, eager to say something pleasant of Mrs. Stannard's friend; "and Captain Raymond says he is a very soldierly officer,—very military, I mean,—and knows his duties so well, only we can't help contrasting him with Mr. Truscott. Mr. Truscott was so dignified and calm and deliberate, while Mr. Billings is a regular bunch of springs. They *say* he's very quick and irascible; real peppery, you know; but I suppose that is because they bother him a good deal."

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"Mr. Billings has a very nervous temperament I know," replied Mrs. Stannard, "but we never thought him ill-tempered at Fort Gaines, and certainly Captain Truscott thinks all the world of him. They correspond constantly, and only last evening he showed me a letter just received from the captain."

"Did he?" said Mrs. Turner, with sudden interest. "What did he say about Grace?"

"About Mrs. Truscott?" said Mrs. Stannard, smilingly. "He said a good deal about her. She was so bright and well and so pleased with West Point, and they had such lovely quarters, looking right out on the plain where they could see everything that was going on, and Miss Sanford was visiting them——"

"What Miss Sanford?" asked Mrs. Turner, with that feminine impetuosity which is born of an incredulity as to any one's being able to convey information in one's own time and way.

"Miss Marion Sanford. She was a classmate of Mrs. Truscott's in their school-days, and belongs to a wealthy New Jersey family, Mr. Billings says."

"Oh, *I* know!" said Mrs. Raymond. "She's that handsome girl in the album that Grace had at Sandy, don't you know? with the Worth dress and the something or other the matter with her forehead,—a burn or a birth-mark,—wears her hair so low over it. Don't you know? Grace told us she had such a sad history,—her mother died when she was sixteen and her father married again, and she has her mother's fortune and had gone abroad. She was travelling with the Zabriskies and was presented at court last year, and the Prince of Wales said something or other about her.

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Don't you know? we read it in the New York something as we were coming out on the Kansas Pacific last fall. My! Just think of her at West Point! What a catch!" And Mrs. Raymond paused, breathless with admiration, not with effort. Talking fatigued her far less than silence.

"Yes, Mrs. Raymond, that is the very one, I believe," continued Mrs. Stannard in her pleasant tones, as soon as the lady came to a full stop. "Mr. Billings says that he has heard that her father married a very unpleasant woman the last time, and that 'twas said he would be——"

"What! Mr. Billings said that? Oh, Mrs. Stannard, how rejoiced I am to hear it! Captain Turner tried to make me believe that he was another Truscott in his horror of gossip. Now, won't I crow over him when he comes in to dinner?"

"Not crow, dear,—cackle," suggested Mrs. Raymond, mildly; "it's the other sex that does the crowing."

"Very possibly I have betrayed a trust," laughed Mrs. Stannard, coming to the rescue in the interests of harmony. "It was my mistake in referring to it. *Do* tell me about Mrs. Truscott; you know I never met her."

"What is there to tell except that she *is* Mrs. Truscott," half laughed, half pouted Mrs. Turner, who never quite forgave the fact that her queendom, real or imaginary, had been invaded by that very lady a year before, to the temporary loss of her throne. As Grace Pelham, Mrs. Truscott had won all hearts at Sandy. "She is undeniably pretty and lady-like; but what else can any one say of her? Stylish? no.

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Now, Mrs. Raymond, you need not try and say *you* think her stylish, because only last year at Prescott you wouldn't admit it. And as to her winning Mr. Truscott as she did, it is simply incomprehensible. What men see in some women is beyond *me*. She is neither deep, nor intellectual, nor particularly well read that *I* ever saw or heard of, and how she's a match for him, as people say, I can't see. He's just head over heels in love with her,—at least he was,—and she was simply wrapped up in him,—at least she is. You ought to have seen the letter she wrote Mrs. Page a few months ago; all about her happiness and Jack,—just as if there never had been another man in the world worth looking at. She'd have been just as rapturous over Mr. Glenham if she'd married him as she promised to do, I haven't a doubt, or Ray. *He* was ready to bow down and worship her at one time; and she encouraged him not a little before we left Sandy, too."

"Don't you believe *that*," interposed Mrs. Raymond. "They were warm friends, I know, but Ray was never her lover."

"You always will contradict me, Nellie," protested Mrs. Turner; "but if you could not see what every one else saw you were simply blind. I wonder she doesn't sometimes regret not marrying Glenham, though. They say he has gone abroad and has more money than he can ever spend."

"More than he ever could if he's as close as he was in Arizona," interposed Mrs. Raymond.

"But did you not know that Captain Truscott's ventures were coming out wonderfully well?" asked Mrs. Stannard, eager to give a pleasanter tone to the talk.

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"I heard not only that was true, but that an uncle had left him a good deal of money. One thing is certain, they have fitted up their quarters beautifully at the Point, and are living there in a good deal of style."

"Here come the officers in from drill," exclaimed Mrs. Turner, as a group of bronzed and soldierly-looking men came suddenly around the corner of the adjutant's office and strolled towards them. "Ask Captain Merrill, he will know. *Captain Merrill,*" she called, raising her voice. "Do come here a moment." And obediently he came, doffing his cap and accepting the seat tendered him beside her by Mrs. Raymond.

"You were at the Point last month. Is it true that Captain Truscott has a good deal of money now?"

"Can't prove it by me, madame," said Merrill, sententiously. "Ask Blake. He's our Jenkins. How is it, Blake?"

"Don't call me pet names, dearie. 'When *my* tongue slabs then let mine eyes not see,'" declaimed Mr. Blake, sauntering up to the group and swinging a long, lean leg over the railing. "What do you want to know?"

"Is Mr.—Captain Truscott rich?"

"If my individual experiences are indicative, I should say he was boundless in wealth and prodigality."

"Why?"

"He lent me a hundred dollars when I was East on leave, and I know he never expects to see it again."

"I declare, Mr. Blake, you are as bad as Mr. Ray!"

"They are scoundrels and substractors that say so of me. Mrs. Turner, you—you make me blush. Ray, come hither and bear me consolation. Friend of my youth, Merrill calls me Jenkins; Mrs. Turner calls me

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bad as you; and you—called me with a pair of kings when mine was a bobtail. The world is hollow, Ray."

"*Mr.* Blake! Will you stop your everlasting nonsense and tell us about Truscott? When were you there?"

"Mrs. Turner, you aggrieve me, but I was there in April."

"And *are* they so delightfully situated?"

"Yea, verily,—blissfully."

"Was Miss Sanford there?"

"She came, alas! the very eve I hied me hence. I saw her but a moment; 'twas——"

"You saw her? Tell us what she's like. Is she pretty? is she sweet-mannered as they say?"

"Sweet? She's sweet, aye, *dix-huit;* at least she was a year agone. Pretty? Ah me!" And Blake sighed profoundly, and straddled the rail a picture of dejection. His auditors groaned in chorus, the customary recognition of one of Blake's puns, but gathered about him in manifest interest. With all his rattling nonsense he was a regimental pet.

"But where is she from? What connection of the New Jersey Sanford?"

"The Autocrat of the Preakness Stable, mean you? Marry, I know not. She is a Sanford and has a Sanford's wealth, but 'twas not for me. She adores a horse and worships a horseman. This I gathered from our too brief converse. I strove to win her ear with poesie, but she bade me cease. Her soul is not attuned to melody,—she'd none of mine. She preferred my Lady Truscott and buttered muffins."

"What did Truscott say about Crook's fight with

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Crazy Horse?" asked Ray, who looked blank enough at Blake's jargon, and wanted facts.

"I don't think Jack liked the looks of things," said Blake, relapsing into sudden gravity. "He told me that he thought it more than likely we'd all be in the field again in less than a month."

"We?" said Merrill. "It isn't a matter that affects Truscott one way or another. He has his four years' detail at the Point. What difference does it make to him whether we're ordered up to reinforce Crook?"

"Just this difference, my bully rook: that Truscott would catch us before we got to Laramie—unless we went by rail."

"Why, Blake, you're addled!" replied the captain, in that uncomplimentary directness which sometimes manifests itself among old comrades of the frontier, even in the presence of the gentler sex. "Why, Mr. Blake, you don't suppose he is going to give up his young wife, his lovely home, his pleasant duties, to join for a mere Indian campaign, do you?" asked more than one present, and a general murmur of dissent went round. "What do *you* say, major?" said one voice, in direct appeal to the senior officer of the group.

"It depends on what you consider a 'mere Indian campaign,'" was the cool response.

"But as to Truscott's going, what do you think, Ray?"

"I don't think anything about it. I *know*."

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CHAPTER III.

HEROINES.

"WHAT is so rare as a day in June?" sings the poet, and where can a day in June be more beautiful than at this Highland Gate of the peerless Hudson? It is June of the Centennial year, and all the land is ablaze with patriotic fervor. From North, from South, from East and West, the products of a nation's ingenuity or a nation's toil have been garnered in one vast exhibition at the Quaker City; and thither flock the thousands of our people. It is June of a presidential nomination, and the eyes of statesmen and politicians are fixed on Cincinnati. It is the celebration of the first century of a nation's life that engrosses the thoughts of millions of hearts, and between that great jubilee and that quadrennial tempest-in-a-teapot, the nomination, who but a few lonely wives and children have time to think of those three columns far, far out in the broad Northwest,—those three columns of regulars, cavalry and infantry, rough-garbed, bronzed and bearded, steadily closing in towards the wild and beautiful region along the northern water-shed of the Big Horn Range, where ten thousand hostile Indians are uneasily watching their coming? On the Atlantic seaboard comrades in full-dress uniform, with polished arms, are standing guard over government treasures on exhibition, and thoughtless thousands wonder at the ease

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and luxury of the soldier's life. Out on the frontier, in buckskin and flannel, slouch hats and leggings, and bristling prairie-belts, the little army is concentrating upon an outnumbering foe, whose signal-fires light the way by night, whose trail is red with blood by day. From the northeast, up the Yellowstone, Terry of Fort Fisher fame, the genial, the warm-hearted general, whose thoughts are ever with his officers and men, leads his few hundred footmen, while Custer, whose division has flashed through battery after battery, charge after charge, in the great Rebellion, now rides at the head of a single regiment. From the northwest, down the Yellowstone, with but a handful of tried soldiery, comes Gibbon; he who led a corps at Gettysburg and Appomattox. From the south, feeling his way along the eastern base of the Big Horn, with less than two thousand troopers and footmen, marches the "Gray Fox," the general under whom our friends of the —th so long and so successfully battled with the Apaches of Arizona. He has met his match this time. Cheyenne, Ogallalla, Brulé, Uncapapa, Minneconjou, Sans Arc, and Blackfoot, all swarm over the broad and breezy uplands in his front, or lurk in the deep shade of the lovely valleys. Twice have they sprung upon him and checked his advance. Once only has he been forced to hesitate, but now, as the longest days of the year approach and the glistening dome of Snow Peak is yet warm with the flush of the setting sun, when "morn, in russet mantle clad," tinges the eastern slopes with glowing light; now, at last, the long-dreaded leaders of the border warfare are being hemmed in between the encircling advance. Now may we look for stir-

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ring work along the bluffs and boulders of the Big Horn.

And June, Centennial June, has come to West Point. Examinations are going briskly on, four buoyant classes are all excitement with the joyous prospects of the season: the seniors look forward to the speedy coming of the longed-for diploma and the prized commission, for relief from the restraint of academic life and for the broader field of the army; the second, the juniors, to reaching the dignity of "first-class camp," with the highest offices and honors to be achieved so long as they shall wear the gray; the third, ah! they are the furloughmen, so soon to be restored for two brief months to home and kindred after the two years of rigid discipline and ceaseless duty; the fourth, to step at once and for all from the meekness of "plebedom" and become the envied "old cadet." June brings bliss for all,—for all but those who fail.

And June brings joy to sisters and sweethearts by the dozen, to fond mammas, to proud paternals, who throng the hostelries of the Point and the neighborhood, and swarm in lively interest all over the historic spot, listening with uncomprehending but tireless patience to examinations on fortification or grand tactics, mechanics or calculus; gasping with excitement over dashing charges on the "cavalry plain," shuddering over the reckless daring in the riding-hall, stopping their ears against the thunder of the great guns at the batteries, and beating time with head and foot to the spirited quicksteps of the band. Dress-parade, the closing ceremony of each day, concentrates the entire assemblage along the shaded walk that borders on the west the

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beautiful green carpet of the "infantry plain," and, at last, as the four gray and white companies go dancing off in double-time through the grim sally-port beneath the barracks, and the carriages and stages whirl away the watching throngs, and the plumed cadet officers scurry off to supper, and, group after group, the spectators saunter homewards, the band disappears below the crest of the plain towards "Bumtown," and little by little the light turns to violet on the wooded heights across the swirling Hudson, and silence settles down upon the scene.

Gazing out from under the foliage of the great elms, watching these very changes, two ladies are seated upon the piazza of the officers' quarters opposite the southern half of the plain. One is a young matron, whose eyes once seen are not soon forgotten,—so soft, so deep, so brown, so truthful are they under the long curling lashes, under the low-arched, heavy brows. Beautiful eyes were they when, in all their girlish fearlessness and innocence, they first beamed upon our old friends of the —th in the days of exile in Arizona. Lovelier still are they now in that consummation of a woman's happiness,—a worshipped wifehood. It was early in the previous winter when Captain Truscott brought his fair bride to make her home among the scenes so dear to both, and her life has been one song of unutterable gladness. If earth contained a thing to wish for in those six months, Grace Truscott could not name it. Her pretty army house is the gem of the military community, the envy of many a wife. Her husband is a man whom all men honor and hold in deep esteem. In strength, in dignity, in soldierly ability, and in his de-

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votion to her he is all her heart could ask. If she loved him dearly when they were married, her love has developed into almost an idolatry,—"Jack" is her world. Not that she talks or writes very much of that matter, however; for quite a wise little head is that which is perched on Mrs. Truscott's white shoulders. Once in a while in some letter to an old and trusted friend she finds it more than she can do to utterly repress her overwhelming sense of bliss, and then she lets slip some little confession of which Jack is the subject. She never dreamed a man could be so lovely, so delicate, so thoughtful, so considerate, so *everything* that was simply perfect, is the way she has once or twice found herself constrained to clinch the matter in default of adjectives sufficiently descriptive. "Every day he develops some new, lovely, and unsuspected trait," she once confided to her friend Mrs. Tanner (with whom she has corresponded quite regularly since her marriage, and to whom we are indebted for some of these interesting details), and as Jack Truscott was confessedly a man of many admirable qualities before his matrimonial alliance, it may be conjectured that ere the waning of her honeymoon Mrs. Jack's enumeration table was beginning to prove inadequate. And bliss has been, and is, becoming to Grace. She has lost none of the girlish delicacy of expression which was so marked a characteristic of her youthful beauty a year before, still she has rounded somewhat, and both mentally and physically has developed. The slender white hand that rests upon the volume of Carlyle in her lap looks less fragile than it did that day at old Camp Sandy when, in Tanner's library searching for the children's books among the shelves,

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it showed itself to Truscott's eyes without a certain ring. Mrs. Jack does not fancy Carlyle. He is too crabbed by far, she thinks, and she wonders how and where people get such distorted views of life, but the captain has been reading him a great deal during the past two months, and anything that interests him is food for her. Happy she is beyond all question, happy as woman ever becomes in this world where happiness is never perfect. If it were, where would be the use of heaven hereafter? And as she sits here gazing out upon the soft lights and shadows settling upon the distant hills, her sweet, mobile face is fit subject for the brush of some inspired painter who seeks a model for an ideal picture,—"I Ask No More."

It is twilight, too, the hour of all others when the faintest sorrow is apt to assert itself upon reposeful features,—the hour when it takes a very happy woman to look happy; yet Grace Truscott's eyes tell of only one story,—love, peace, tranquillity; and at last the silence is broken by the remark, which is naturally the result of a woman's undisturbed contemplation of such a face,—

"I declare, Grace, it is enough to make one *want* to marry just to look at you!"

Mrs. Truscott returns to earth with sudden bound, dropping her blissful day-dream with a merry laugh and a blush that refuses to down at her bidding. She holds forth her hand appealingly, leaning forward in the great wicker rocking-chair in which, till now, she has been lazily reclining.

"How absurd, to be sure! I wish you would seize me and shake me, Marion, whenever you see me going

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off into dreamland like that. It is simply detestable. Yet, I can't help it. Oh!" with sudden impulse, "wait till you marry some one the least like Jack, and then see for yourself."

"But I never shall marry any one the least like Jack," replies Miss Sanford. "To begin with, you would not be apt to admit any such man could exist. Now, don't bristle all over, Grace; you are not in the least absurd,—to ordinary people that is; you really behave very creditably for so young a wife, but you are quite warranted in betraying your admiration to me. I like it. It was simply mean of me to interrupt your revery as I did, but the exclamation was involuntary. I had been watching your face for several minutes, and thinking how few, how very few women are blessed as you are."

Mrs. Truscott's eyes filled with tears, and her hand sought and clasped that of her friend. A most unusual caress for her.

"Sometimes I fear I'm growing very selfish in it all, Marion, and I blame myself more than I can tell you when these spells come over me. We had planned to make your visit lovely,—Jack and I,—and here, the moment we are alone together, I go mooning off and leaving you to be entertained by the sight of my imbecility." Mrs. Truscott gave herself a vigorous shake. "There! Now tell me about your walk. Was Mr. Ferris pleasant?"

"Pleasant? Very! They all are for that matter, and I hate to think how much I've lost in being away all May. Father insisted though, and so those six weeks had to be spent at —— with them. It is mock-

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ery to call it home." And a deep trouble seemed to settle on her beautiful face.

Mrs. Truscott leaned nearer to her friend, an eager tremor in her voice.

"Listen, Marion dear," she spoke; "I cannot allude to the subject except when you do; but, much as your father loves you, he must see now that it is next to impossible for you to live at home, and after her conduct this spring,—first demanding that you should come instead of spending May with us as was arranged, and then making it so wretched for you, and finally almost driving you from the house,—it is useless to think of going back this summer. *Do* spend it with us. We both ask it, Jack and I. It was such a disappointment to lose you in May, and now that we've got you again, —though you said 'twas only for a week,—we talked it all over last night, Maid Marion,"—and here Mrs. Truscott has recourse to one of the pet names of their school-days,—"we talked it all over, Jack and I, and that was one of the things he went to the city for today. He had determined to ask your father to let you spend the summer here. I want it so much, so does Jack, for he may have to go to Kentucky to buy horses for the cavalry stables. Marion, *do* stay if he will let you." And both Mrs. Truscott's white hands now seized and clasped the unresisting, passive members that lay, still gloved, in her companion's lap.

For a moment there was no move. Two big tears were starting from Miss Sanford's eyes; her sweet, sensitive lips were twitching nervously. She glanced hurriedly up and down the broad road in front of the quarters,—they were unobserved and alone,—and, lean-

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ing back in her chair, she gently withdrew one hand and held her handkerchief to her face. Mrs. Truscott quickly rose and bent over her, pressed her lips one instant upon the luxuriant hair that fell thickly over the girl's forehead; then, twining her arm around her head, nestled her own soft cheek where she had pressed her lips. And there she hovered, saying nothing more, waiting until the little rain-cloud had passed away.

Presently there came the sound of quick, springy footsteps along the asphalt from the direction of the barracks. Mrs. Truscott raised her head.

"It is Sergeant Wolf, Marion. I think he is coming here."

Miss Sanford started up, wiped her eyes and half turned her back, as a young soldier in the undress uniform of a cavalry sergeant entered the gateway, and, halting at the foot of the steps, respectfully raised hand to his cap, and stood there as though addressing an officer.

"Pardon me, madame," he asked, with a distinctly German accent, but with the intonation of a gentleman on every syllable. "The captain has not yet returned?"

"Not yet, sergeant; I expect him on the eight-thirty train."

"It is about Corporal Stein, madame; he has overstayed his pass."

"I presume Mr. Waring should be told. Have you seen him?"

"Madame, the lieutenant is neither at his quarters nor the mess."

"Then there is nothing further to be done that I know of," said Mrs. Truscott, whose girlhood had been passed

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in garrison at times, and whose earliest recollections were of papa's dragoons. "I will tell the captain as soon as he returns." And she stepped backward towards the chairs.

The sergeant paused one moment. He was tall, lithe, of graceful and muscular mould; his face was of the singular Saxon cast,—so very fair; his eyes were blue and clear, his nose and mouth finely shaped; his teeth were white and even, his hair crisp and curly, and the very color of bleached straw, but redeemed from that dead, soda-dried effect by the sheen of every lock; his face was oval; clean-shaved but for the upper lip, whose long, blond moustache twirled trooper-fashion till the ends almost swept his ears. He was a handsome fellow, and his manners and language bespoke him a man of education. After the moment's hesitation, he again touched his cap and quitted the little garden, walking away with quick, brisk steps and erect carriage towards the upper end of the row.

Mrs. Truscott stood silently looking after him a moment, then she turned:

"Did you notice his hands, Marion?"

"Certainly; I did the first time I saw him, and he is always here. You say Wolf is an assumed name?"

"Yes. Jack says there can be no question but that he is an educated German officer who has had to quit the service there for some crime or trouble. He came here just when I did, last December; and Jack says he is the finest first sergeant he ever saw, though I believe the men don't fancy him. He speaks French as well as he does English, and there is apparently nothing he does not know about cavalry service."

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"And how did he happen to be in the army?"

"I do not know; there was nothing else for him to do, I suppose. The old first sergeant of the cavalry detachment here was discharged last fall, and when a new one was needed, and there seemed to be no really good one in the troop, Jack wrote to a recruiting officer in the city to send him a first-class man. One day he got a letter saying that a young German desired to enlist for cavalry service who was evidently a thorough soldier, and that there was some mystery about him. He was dressed like a gentleman, but had not a cent of money, and claimed to have arrived only within three days from the old country. Next day the man himself came here. Jack had told me nothing about the letter. The servant said there was a gentleman in the parlor wanted to see the captain. Jack was away at the riding-hall, and I went into the parlor, and there stood this tall, fine-looking fellow. I thought, of course, he must be some officer on leave,—some one whom Jack knew. It was a little dark,—one of those rainy December days, and he had his back to the light,—but the moment he spoke and I heard the German accent I saw there was a mistake. He seemed greatly embarrassed, said he had been told he would find the captain here, apologized for the intrusion, and started for the door, when I saw his face was as white as a sheet and that he was staggering, and the next thing I knew he had dropped like a fainting woman in the big arm-chair. Something told me he was weak from want of food. I called Mary, and got some wine and made him drink it, and pretty soon he revived, and then Jack came, and I left them together. He

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said that he had eaten nothing for three days and was exhausted.

"Well, Jack questioned him closely that evening after he had made him rest and had fed him well, poor fellow! and the result was that in a day or two he regularly enlisted. Jack really tried to induce him not to, telling him that a man of his education would surely find something better, but it was useless. He said that if he could not enlist here he would go back to New York and enter for service on the frontier, so, finally, it was settled. He was made a corporal in a few weeks, and now he is first sergeant. He is invaluable in that respect; still, I do wish there were no mystery. I hate mysteries. He is never seen with the men at all, and when not on duty he is always reading. Jack lends him books that no other soldier cares to look at and that they do not have in the troop library. That is what brings him here so often. He comes every day or two with a book he has read and wants another; but his name isn't Wolf. Somewhere, he has a seal ring with a crest on it, and last month—there had been some trouble among the men, and two hard characters had laid in wait for the sergeant one dark night near the stables and assaulted him, but he was too quick and powerful for them, though they escaped—last month he brought Jack a sealed packet which he asked him to keep, and if anything happened to him it was to be returned to an address he gave in Dresden. It's really quite a romance, but I wish——" And Mrs. Truscott broke off abruptly without saying what she *did* wish.

Miss Sanford was silent. She had recovered her self-control, and the traces of recent tears were vanish-

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ing. Once more Mrs. Truscott seated herself by her side.

"You will stay with us, won't you?" she said, with that uninterrogative accent on the "won't" which is indicative of a conviction on part of the questioner that denial is impossible.

"Yes, Grace, gladly, if Captain Truscott can win papa over to it. I shall be far happier here, and he will at least have peace at home. She will be satisfied and content if I am not there. How can I thank you enough, Gracie? I had almost made up my mind to ask Mrs. Zabriskie to take me back to Europe with her. You know she returns on the 'Werra' in July."

"Indeed you shall not. I had counted on having you for bridesmaid, and you would not come home. That was the only disappointment in my wedding; but, after all, since Mr. Ray couldn't come, there would have been a groomsman short if you *had* been there."

"Why didn't he come? You never told me."

"Why? Poor Mr. Ray! He wrote one of his laughing letters to Jack to say that he'd be switched if he was going to play hangman at his own execution. You never knew such a queer fellow as he is. The real reason was that he could not afford to come East from Kansas and give us a wedding present too. Jack and I would have far rather had him drop the present, but could not see how to tell him. He sent us that lovely ice-cream set, you know,—one of the prettiest of all my presents. Everybody thought Ray must have been studying up on art, it was so graceful and pretty. Mr. Gleason, I believe it was, said that Ray wrote to Colo-

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nel Thayer of the lieutenant-general's staff and had him buy it: he was in Chicago when we were married,—you know that was Grandmother De Ruyter's stipulation,—and that Colonel Thayer, not Ray, was entitled to the credit for taste; but Jack says that there is far more to Ray than most people give him credit for. He's a loyal friend anyway!"

"What was the name of that droll creature who was here last April,—Drake? Blake?"

"Mr. Blake? Oh, yes! He is one of the characters of the regiment. He is the book of nonsense on two very long legs, but he is full of fun and full of goodness. He is not at all Mr. Ray's kind, however. Jack says that Mr. Ray is the man of all others whom he would most expect to come to the front in a general war, and that nothing could shake his faith in him. Ray could never do or say a dishonorable thing."

"And wasn't it Mr. Ray who saved you when your horse was running away?"

"The very man. You glory so in daring horsemanship, Marion, I just wish you could see Ray ride. Jack is splendid, of course, but he is so much larger, heavier, you know. Ray rides as lightly as a bird flies; he seems just part of a horse, as indeed Jack does, but then there's this difference: Mr. Ray rides over hurdles and ditches and prairie-dog holes and up and down hill just like an Indian, and the wonder is he isn't killed. Jack is a fine horseman,—nobody looks better in the saddle than he,—but then Jack rarely rides at top speed,—never, unless there's some reason for it.

"See, Marion, it's almost dark. Shall we go in the parlor and light the lamps?"

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"Grace, wasn't Mr. Ray just a little bit in love with you once?"

"Honestly, Marion, no! I know he admired me, and I liked him, and had reason to like him greatly, for he was a true friend to me when I wanted one at Sandy. Once he was a wee bit sentimental," and even in the dusk Grace could feel that Marion saw the flush that mounted to her very brows, "but that was when I fainted after the runaway; never before, never since. Don't talk nonsense, Maidie."

"I think I should like to know him," said Miss Sanford, as she rose to enter the hall.

"I *know* you would. Only—well, you might not like him entirely, either. Jack should be here in less than half an hour now, then we'll have tea. Oh, Marion! I'm so glad you will stay, so will he be."

On the parlor-table, as they entered, lay two letters. Turning up the gas, Mrs. Truscott scanned the superscriptions. Both were addressed to her husband. One was postmarked Fort Hays.

"This is the one Jack will open first," she said to her friend. "I don't know whom the other comes from, but this is news from the regiment. It is Mr. Billings's writing, and Jack is always eager for news from him."

"Mr. Ferris asked me this evening, while we were walking, if Captain Truscott had any news from his regiment. He seemed unusually interested. I could not tell why, but it was something about General Crook being heavily reinforced by troops from somewhere. They were talking of it down at the mess to-day, and Mr. Waring said that if his regiment were ordered on

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that duty, he would apply by telegraph to Washington for orders to join it at once. There was some embarrassment then, because one of the gentlemen present—Mr. Ferris wouldn't say who—belonged to a regiment already there on that very campaign, and he had not applied for orders at all, and wasn't going to, and—— Why, *Grace!* What is the matter?"

With her face rapidly paling Grace Truscott had stood gazing piteously at her companion, and then, seizing the letter in her trembling hands, she stood glaring at the address. For a moment she made no reply, and again Miss Sanford, alarmed, repeated her question.

"Marion! Marion! It means that I know now why Jack did not show me Major Stannard's last letter. It means that this letter from the adjutant is to tell Jack that the —th is ordered into the field. It means—it means"—and she threw herself prone upon the sofa, clinching her hands above her head—"it means that my dream of delight is shattered; they will take my husband from me."

"But how—but why, Grace? I don't understand. Mr. Ferris said distinctly that Captain Truscott would not be affected, that he had just begun his detail here. If an officer doesn't *have* to go when his regiment is already in the field, how can your husband be required?"

"*My* husband! Marion. You don't know him, neither does Mr. Ferris, if that's his idea. My husband would never wait to be ordered to join his comrades on campaign. If that letter says the —th is to go, that ends it all, for Jack will start to-morrow."

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CHAPTER IV.

IMPENDING SHADOWS.

WHEN Captain Truscott drove up from the ferry and sprang from the carriage at his gate, a cheerful light beamed from the open door and windows of his home, and Grace, all loving greeting, met him on the piazza. He could not but note the warmth of her embrace and welcome; but Jack had been in town since early morning, and never before since their marriage had they been separated a single day. In the dim twilight on the piazza he could not see what was apparent as soon as they entered the parlor,—that his young wife's face was unusually pale and her lovely eyes showed suspicious trace of tears; but he could only glance an anxious inquiry, there was then no time for more, as Miss Sanford stood smilingly at the centre-table.

Truscott stepped forward with his old-fashioned courtesy and bowed over her extended hand. A few words of pleasant welcome and greeting were exchanged, a few inquiries as to whom he had seen in New York and what had been the result of his various commissions. Then as the dining-room door was opened and the maid announced that tea was served, Truscott looked inquiringly at the table.

"Any mail, Gracie?"

"Oh, yes, Jack. I put them under Carlyle; two letters."

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The captain merely glanced at the superscription of the first letter, but when the second caught his eye, he shot one quick look at his wife, their eyes met, and leaving the first letter upon the table, he stowed the heavier missive in the breast-pocket of the civilian suit he was wearing, led the way to the dining-room door, and there smilingly bowed the ladies to the brightly-lighted table, and demanded of Miss Sanford an immediate and detailed account of the day's conquests.

Not until near midnight could Grace see her husband alone.

It was "band night," and long before they had finished tea rich strains of music came floating in from the parade, and, as is always the case, visitors began to arrive. Several ladies and officers dropped in during the evening; they sat on the piazza enjoying the serenade until the shrill piping of the fifes and rattle of the drums sounding tattoo sent the musicians off to bed and numerous pairs of white trousers scurrying towards the cadet barracks. They watched the simultaneous "dousing of the glim" in the long façade as the clock struck ten and the three taps of the drum ordered "lights out." Then they entered the parlor and Grace had to sing. For the last year she had gloried in singing, her voice seemed so rich with melody, her heart so rich with joy. To-night all the strange old feeling came back. It made her think of those wretched days at Sandy, when with Jack thousands of miles away, perhaps never to see or speak to her again, she *had* to sing because her father loved it so. She was a soldier's daughter, a soldier's wife, and she rallied all her strength and pride and strove to be blithe and animated and

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entertaining. From her first appearance Mrs. Truscott had been a favorite in that somewhat exacting garrison, perhaps the hardest one in the army in which to achieve popularity, because of the various cliques and interests; and now that that very interesting Miss Sanford was with her, their pretty home on the plain was always a rendezvous for the socially disposed. And so it happened that all the long evening neither she nor Jack could obtain release from their duties as entertainers. Eleven o'clock came before the last of the ladies departed, and then Mr. Ferris lingered for a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Sanford, and poor Grace found herself compelled to sit and talk with Mr. Barnard, who was a musical devotee and afflicted with a conviction that they ought to sing duets, and Mrs. Truscott could not be induced to sing duets with any man, unless Jack would try.

She knew that he had gone to the little library where he kept his favorite books and did his writing. She heard the door close after him, and, with unutterable longing, she desired to go and throw herself upon her favorite perch, his knee, and twine her arms around his neck and bury her head upon his broad shoulder. She could think of nothing but that fateful letter from Hays. She wished that it might be Mr. Waring who had come in, for he was in the cavalry and would know something of what really was going on out on the frontier. She was feverishly anxious to learn the truth, and twice directed the talk that way, but Mr. Barnard was obtuse. He only vaguely knew from remarks he had heard at mess that General Crook had called for reinforcements, and that Sheridan was ordering up cavalry

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and infantry to his support. He did not know what cavalry,—in fact, he did not care,—he was in the artillery, and, forgetful of Modoc experiences, believed that Indian fighting was an abnormal species of warfare of which men of his advanced education were not expected to take cognizance. That it ever could call for more science, skill, and pluck than the so-called civilized wars of which Mr. Barnard was a conscientious student he would probably never have admitted, and his comment at mess on the frequently-recurring tales of unsuccessful attack upon savage foes was the comprehensive remark that the affair must have been badly handled; "those fellows of the cavalry didn't seem to understand the nature of the work they had to tackle." As those were the days before a cavalry superintendent went to the Academy and showed an astonished academic board what a cavalryman's idea of scholarship and discipline really was, it followed that the corps of instructors was made up almost entirely from the more scientific arms; only two or three cavalrymen were on the detail of forty officers, and they were mainly for duty as instructors in tactics and horsemanship. So when Mr. Barnard dreamily blew the smoke of his cigarette through his elevated nostrils and gave it as his opinion that those cavalry fellows didn't seem to understand their work, his audience, consisting mainly of staff and artillery officers, gave the acquiescence of silence or the nod of wisdom; and the casual visitor would have left with the impression that the whole mistake of this Indian business lay in failure to consult the brilliantly-trained intellects of the higher corps. Odd as it may seem, it is the men who have had the least to do with Indians and Indian

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fighting who have apparently the most ideas on the subject. This is not a paradox. Those who have spent several years at it probably started in with just as many, and exploded them one after another.

Mr. Barnard, therefore, was more intent on humming the tenor part of "See the Pale Moon" than of affording Mrs. Truscott any information as to rumors of the orders sending additional troops to the field, but her anxiety was only slightly appeased by his airy dismissal of the subject.

"Indeed, Mrs. Truscott, I would not feel any concern in the matter; with the forces now concentrated up there in the Yellowstone country, the result is a foregone conclusion. The Indians will simply be surrounded and starved into surrender."

At last they went. Mr. Ferris with evident reluctance and not until he had plainly received intimation from Miss Sanford that it was more than time. Knowing Mrs. Truscott well, she could see what was imperceptible to their visitors, that the strain was becoming almost unbearable. The moment they were gone she turned to her friend.

"I must write a short letter before going to bed, Grace dear. Now go to him at once;" then impulsively she threw her arms around her. "I shall pray it is not true," she murmured, then turned and ran quickly to her room.

Mrs. Truscott closed and bolted the front door, turned out the parlor lights, and stepped quickly to the library; then she paused a moment before turning the knob: her heart was beating heavily, her hands trembling. She strove hard to control the weakness

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which had seized her, and, for support, rested her head upon the casement and took two or three long breaths; then with a murmured prayer for strength she gently opened the door, and the soft swish of her trailing skirts announced her presence.

His back was towards her as she entered; he was seated in a low-backed library-chair, with both elbows upon the writing-table before him, and resting his head upon the left hand in an attitude that was habitual with him when seated there thinking. Before him, opened, lay a long letter,—the adjutant's letter from Hays. A pen was in his hand, but not a scratch had he made on the virgin surface of the paper. Truscott never so much as wrote the date until he had fully made up his mind what the entire letter should be, and he had far from made up his mind what to say in this.

Without a word Mrs. Truscott stole quietly up behind him. He had been expecting her any moment; he knew well she would come the instant her visitors left her free; he was listening, waiting for her step, and had heard Miss Sanford trip lightly up-stairs. Then came the soft, quick pitapat of her tiny feet along the hall and the *frou-frou* of the skirts,—never yet could he hear it without a little thrill of passionate delight. He half turned in readiness to welcome her, his love, his wife; then came her pause at the door,—a new, an unknown hesitancy, for from the first he had taught her that she alone could never be unwelcome, undesired, no matter what his occupation in the sanctum, and Jack's heart stood still while hers was throbbing heavily. Could she have heard? Could she have suspected? *Must* he tell her to-night? He turned

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again to the desk as she entered, and waited for—something he loved more than he could ever tell,—her own greeting.

Often when he was reading or writing during the day, and she, on household cares intent, was tripping lightly about the house, singing sweetly, softly as she passed the library, and bursting into carolling melody when at undisturbing distance away, it was odd to note the many little items that required her frequent incursions on the sanctum itself,—books to be straightened and dusted, scraps of writing-paper to be tidied up, maps to be rolled and tied. Mollie, the housemaid, could sweep or tend the fires in that domestic centre, the captain's den, but none but the young housewife herself presumed to touch a pen or dust a tome. Jack's mornings were mainly taken up at the barracks, riding-hall, or in mounted drill far out on the cavalry plain, whence his ringing baritone voice could reach her admiring ears and—for it was only honeymoon with her still—set her to wondering if it really were possible that that splendid fellow were her own, her very own; and time and again Mrs. Grace would find herself stopping short in her avocation and going to the front windows and gazing with all her lovely brown eyes over to the whirling dust-cloud on the eastern plain and revelling in the power and ring of Jack's commanding voice, and going off into day-dreams. *Was* it possible that there had been a great, a fearful war, in which the whole country was threatened with ruin, and hundreds of men had made wonderful names for themselves, and Jack not one of them,—Jack, her hero, her soldier beyond compare? *Could* it be that the war was fought and won without

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him? But then, who could be braver in action, wiser in council, than he? Did not the —th worship him to a man? Was not Indian fighting the most trying, hazardous, terrible of all warfares, and was not Jack pre-eminent as an Indian-fighter? Was there not a deep scar on his breast that would have been deeper and redder but for her little filmy handkerchief that stopped the cruel arrow just in time? Was any one so gallant, so noble, so gentle, so tender, true, faithful,—um-m-m,—sweet? was the way Mrs. Grace's intensified thoughts would have found expression, had she dared, even to herself, to give them utterance? And he loved her! he loved her! and—heavens and earth! but *this* isn't practising, or housework either; and pretty, happy, blushing Mrs. Truscott would shake herself together, so to speak, and try to get back to the programme of daily duty she had so conscientiously mapped out for herself. Perhaps it was because she accomplished so little in the mornings that, when Jack betook himself to his study for his two hours of reading or writing in the afternoon, his witching wife would find such frequent need of entering. At first she had been accustomed to trip in on tiptoe after a timid little knock and the query, "Do I disturb you, Jack dear?"—a query which he answered with quite superfluous assurance to the contrary. Later, even after their wise conclusion that they must be rational, she had been accustomed to put the question, not at all as a purely perfunctory marital civility, but, as she shyly admitted to herself, because it was so sweet to hear Jack's negation and see the love-light in the eyes that soon brought her, fascinated and fluttering, to be folded in his arms a moment. Later

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still, so confident had she become in her dominion, both knock and query were abandoned, and, unless only five minutes or so had elapsed since the previous visit, she had a pretty little way of greeting him that, though very gradually acquired despite surging impulse, was at last quite a settled fact, and he loved it,—well, he would have been an unappreciative, undeserving brute had he not. She would steal behind him, lean over the back of the chair (Jack refused to exchange it for the high-backed one suggested by Mrs. Pelham on the occasion of a brief visit paid them in March), and, twining her arms around his neck, would draw back his head till it rested on her bosom, then sink her soft, sweet lips upon his forehead. It was this he waited for to-night, and not in vain.

Another minute and he had drawn her around and seated her on his knee, folding her closely in his arms. But soon she gently released herself, slipped to the little ottoman that stood always ready by his chair, and, clasping her hands upon his knee, looked bravely up in his face. No need to speak one word,—no need to break it to her; he saw she well divined that news, and hard news, had come from the frontier,—news which meant more to her than to any woman at West Point.

"Shall I read it, Gracie?" he presently asked, gently stroking the shining, shimmering wealth of her hair,—her glory and his. She bowed lower her head and clasped tightly her hands.

"One word first, Jack. Does the —th go?"

"Yes, darling."

She shivered as though a sudden chill had seized her, but spoke no word. Truscott bent and strove to

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draw her again to his breast, but she roused herself with gallant effort,—threw back her head and again looked bravely up in his eyes.

"No; I'll bear it best here, Jack. I won't—— Read it, dear."

"My brave girlie!" was all he said, as his eyes moistened suspiciously and his hand lingered in its caress upon her soft cheek.

"It's from Billings, you know."

"Yes, Jack; go on."

And then he read to her:

"FORT HAYS, KANSAS, June 6, '76.

"DEAR TRUSCOTT,—Stannard showed me your letter and bade me answer it. There was no time for him to do it, and I myself am writing 'on the jump.' You sized up the situation about as comprehensively as Crook himself could have done it, and your predictions have come true. Eight troops of the regiment left night before last by rail for Cheyenne *via* Denver, and by this time headquarters and most of the —th are tenting somewhere near Fort Russell, where we are all to take station and wait further developments. The band follows as fast as we can pack up plunder and be off. It means, of course, a permanent transfer of the regiment to the Department of the Platte, and from the mere fact that the colonel and eight companies were hurried ahead, there can be no question but that we are destined to take part in the campaign against Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, etc., and for myself, I'm glad of it.

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"But I'm glad you weren't here, Jack. There was weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth among the women-folks, and some two or three Benedicts looked bluer than brimstone. You know they had counted on a peaceful summer and a good time, and it's particularly rough on those who had fitted up their quarters so handsomely and had young ladies to visit them, like the Raymonds and others. Most of them have to break up and go East, but as six troops are to take permanent station at Russell, yours among them, those who are ordered there will simply move from Hays to Russell with us, as the officers can choose quarters on the way up; for up we are going, and I'll bet a farm we water our horses in the Yellowstone before we see Russell a second time. As soon as packed I shall move all baggage to Russell, public and personal, escort the ladies thither and see them comfortably settled in their new quarters. Mrs. Stannard, Mrs. Turner, and Mrs. Wilkins (of course) go to Russell with us. Old Whaling of the Infantry is to remain in command there until the campaign is over, as it will be the main supply depot. His wife is an enlivening Christian, a sort of Mrs. Gummidge and Mrs. Malaprop rolled into one, but, barring a sensational tendency and a love for theatricals in every-day life, there is nothing dangerous about her. I'm glad my own wife will be able to remain with the home people, for Mrs. Whaling would scare the life out of her with her tales of fearful adventure in the Indian country, and I don't quite like the idea of our ladies being subjected to her ministrations during the separation. However, Mrs. Stannard will be there, and she's a

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balance-wheel. Bless that woman! What would we do without her?

"Now, Jack, a word from Stannard himself. He said to write you fully, that nothing might be concealed. Stryker's letter is straight to the point. It is going to be the biggest Indian war the country has ever seen, and one in which there must be hard fighting. Armed, equipped, and supplied and mounted as those Sioux and Cheyennes are, it will take our best to thrash them. Stannard says that you must be influenced in your action by no misrepresentation one way or other. No man in the regiment can say in his presence or mine that you have not done your full share of Indian work, and no gentleman in the regiment will blame you should you see fit to stick to the Point and let the rest of us tackle Mr. Lo. You are the only newly-married man in the crowd. On the other hand, your troop is commanded in your absence by Gleason, whom—well, you know him better than I; and in his absence by young Wells, who is to take his first lesson in campaigning this summer. Just as luck would have it, Gleason and Ray were ordered to Leavenworth on a horse board, and were not here to go with the command. Ray heard of the move and telegraphed, begging Stannard to get him relieved and sent at once to the regiment, but the board was ordered at division headquarters and 'twas no use. Ray will have to stay until the horses are all bought; and I'm bound to say he did his best to get back. For some reason, which I could better explain if I didn't have to write, Ray and I don't seem to 'gee.' He has been offish to me ever since our first meeting here, and was one of the men

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whose failure to congratulate me on the adjutancy I felt. Then I heard of some unjustifiable though, perhaps, natural things he said. However, let that slide. I wish you were adjutant again, that's all. Very probably the others do too. The colonel telegraphed to all officers on leave, and every blessed one responded inside of twenty-four hours, 'Coming first train, you bet,' or words to that effect. It makes one proud of the old —th. Gleason hasn't chirped, but then he is somewhere in central Iowa buying. They say Ray's brother-in-law is one of the largest horse-dealers, and Stannard clamps his mug and looks ugly when it is spoken of. He knows something about him, and was a good deal stampeded when he heard Ray was being wined and dined by him at Kansas City. But, be it understood, I don't think Ray has any suspicion of Stannard's objection to the man. And now, Jack, I'll wind up this rigmarole. It is long after taps, and the men are still at work packing. I've been interrupted time and again, and this is all incoherency. If you decide to join, let it not be said for an instant that the faintest urging came from us. Address your next to Russell. The colonel forbade my telegraphing you lest it might sound like a hint. My compliments to Mrs. Truscott, and tell her I saw her old friend Ranger off for the wars two nights ago; likewise that young imp of the devil,—the Kid. Tanner's old troop isn't what it was in his day.

"Yours always faithfully,

"BILLINGS."

Long before he had finished reading she had bowed

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her head upon her hands, but there came no sound. At last he laid the letter down, and then bent over her.

"Grace,—darling!"

Slowly she lifted her eyes and looked up in his face. All the light, all the joy and gladness had fled. Her lips moved as though to question, but a hard, dry lump seemed to have formed in her throat; she could not speak. His strong hands trembled as they gently raised her from the lowly attitude in which she had been crouching at his knee. He would have drawn her to his breast again, but she put her little hands upon his shoulder and held herself back. Twice she essayed to speak before the words came,—

"Jack, God knows I have tried to be ready for this. But is there *no* way? I never thought to stand between you and your duty—your honor. I would not—I would not now if I were—all. Oh, Jack,—my husband, there—there is another reason."

CHAPTER V.

MARION SANFORD.

As a school-girl Marion Sanford started by being unpopular. On first acquaintance there were very few girls in Madame Reichard's excellent establishment who did not decide that she was cold and unsympathetic. Courteous, well-bred, self-possessed, she was to a fault, but—unpardonable sin in school-girl eyes—she shrank from those dear and delicious intimacies, those mushroom

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friendships of our tender years, that are as explosive as fire-crackers and as evanescent as the smoke thereof. The volumes of satire that have been written on the subject have exhausted the field and rendered new ideas out of the question, but they have in no wise diminished the impetuosity with which such friendships are daily, hourly entered into, and they never will. Ours is a tale which has little that is new and less that is didactic. Army life and army loves differ, after all, but little from those which one sees in every community. Human nature is the same the world over, despite our different tenets and traditions. Boys are as full of mischief and sure to get into scrapes as in the days of Elijah and the bears. Girls have had their sweet secrets and desperate intimacies with one another since long before Elijah was heard of. Nothing one can say is apt to put a stop to what the Almighty set in motion. Let us not rail at what we cannot correct, but make the best of it. Let us accept the truth. School-girls meet, take desperate and sudden fancies, swear eternal friendships, have eternal tiffs and squabbles, kiss and make up, fall out again, and as they grow in grace and wisdom they keep up the system, simply taking a new object every few months. It is one of their weaknesses by divine right, over which common sense has no more control than it has over most of ours.

But Marion Sanford had no such weakness. Being destitute of the longing for intimate and confidential intercourse with some equally romantic sister, she was spared the concomitant heartburnings, recriminations, and enmities. She passed her first year at the school without an intimate friend. She left it without an

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enemy. Hers was not the most brilliant mind in the class. She was not the valedictorian of the school on that eventful day when,

"Sweet girl-graduates with their shining hair,"

they listened in tears and white muslin to Madame's parting injunctions; but her last two years at the old *pension* had been very precious to her. Grace Pelham was her room-mate, and Grace Pelham's loving arms had opened to her when, motherless and heart-broken, Marion Sanford had returned from the second year's summer vacation. Between the two girls there had gradually grown a deep and faithful friendship, born of mutual respect and esteem. It would be saying too much to assert that at first there had been no differences. Four years at one school give opportunities which are illimitable, but the present writer knew neither of them in the bread-and-butter period, and was properly reproved by the one and snubbed by the other when, in the supposed superiority of his years and co-extensive views on the frangibility of feminine friendship, he had sought to raise the veil of the past and peer into the archives of those school-days. Partly from schoolmates and partly from observation the author formed his opinion of what Marion Sanford had been as an undergraduate. What she became the candid reader must judge for —self.

For a woman she was reticent to a marked degree in discussing the faults and foibles of others. She was slow to anger, loath to believe ill of a man or woman, truth-loving, sincere, and simple-hearted. She had not

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been the most studious girl at school. Deep down in her heart of hearts she had a vein of romance that made the heroes of fiction the idols of a vivid imagination. Wilfrid of Ivanhoe, Sir Galahad, Launcelot, William Wallace, Bayard, Philip Sidney, were men whom she fondly believed to have existed in other shapes and names time and again, and yet she was staggered in her faith because the annals of our matter-of-fact days told no such tales as those she loved of knighthood and chivalry. Once—once she had found a modern hero. Heaven only knows to what a wild worship would not that brief dream have expanded had she not seen him. He was the elder brother of one of her friends at school,—a navy officer,—a man who when his ship was cut down by a blundering Briton, and sent to the bottom with over a hundred gallant hearts high-beating because "homeward bound," he, the young ensign, gave his whole strength, his last conscious minute to getting the helpless into the lowered boats, and was the last man in the "sick-bay" before the stricken ship took her final plunge, carrying him into the vortex with a fevered boy in his strong young arms. Both were unconscious when hauled into safety, and that ensign, said Marion, was the man she would marry. She was less than sixteen and had never seen him. The nearest approach to a desperate intimacy she ever had was with that fellow's sister: a girl of hitherto faint attractions. At last the ensign came to the school,—such a day of excitement!—and as a great, a *very* great concession, Madame had permitted that he should be allowed in her presence to speak with his sister's most intimate friends. She was threatened with popularity for the time being, and Marion was pre-

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sented. The hero of her four months' dream was a stoutly-built youth of twenty-five, with florid complexion and hair, and a manner so painfully shy and embarrassed that additional color was lent to his sun-blistered features. He had faced death without a tremor and, in the most matter-of-fact way in the world, had saved three lives at the imminent risk of his own, but he could not face these wide-eyed, worshipping school-girls, and was manifestly ill at ease in a very unbecoming civilian suit. Still, he wriggled through the interview and made his escape, leaving only a modified sensation behind. The fatal *coup* occurred next day when, as prearranged, he came to say farewell. This time Jack Tar had braced for the occasion, and was unexpectedly hilarious and demonstrative. In bidding good-by to his sister he had effusively embraced her, then turned suddenly upon Marion, and before she could dream of what was coming, had caught her in his arms and imprinted upon her fresh young lips a bacchanalian salute that left thereon a mingled essence of Angostura bitters, cloves, and tobacco, and drove her in dismay and confusion from the room to seek her own in a passion of angry tears and disenchantment. Never before in her life had she known such an affront. Never for long afterwards did she worship modern heroes.

But while she sought no intimacies, as a school-girl her friendship and affection for Grace Pelham strengthened with every week of their association. Their last two years at school were spent as room-mates, and then Marion had gone almost immediately abroad. Some hint has been conveyed to the reader of a domestic unpleasantness in the Sanford homestead. Sanford paterfamilias was a

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successful business man of large means and small sensibilities. His first wife, Marion's mother, was a New York beauty, a sweet, sensitive, refined, and delicate girl; in fine, "a sacrifice at the altar of Mammon." She married Mr. Sanford when she was eighteen and he thirty-eight, and she married him because the family necessities were such that she could not help herself. Marion was their first child, the darling of a young mother's heart, and later, the pride of a fond father's. Yet, before that daughter was eighteen she was called upon to welcome in the place of her idolized mother—who had died after some years of patient suffering—the children's governess. It marred all joys of graduation, so far as Miss Sanford was concerned. She had gone home in obedience to her conviction of filial duty, and had striven to make her little sister and her brother believe that the new mamma was all that she should be. She had been conscientiously earnest in her effort to like in her new rôle the ex-governess, whom she had found it impossible to believe in before. The effort was a failure, due quite as much to the jealous and suspicious nature of the lady of the house as to Miss Sanford's unconquerable prejudice. Pretences for rupture were easily found; the rupture came; Mrs. Sanford did all the talking, Miss Sanford said nothing. When her father came home from the city he found his new wife in tears and his daughter fled. The Frenchman who wrote *les absents ont toujours tort* was undoubtedly thinking of the field as left in possession of a woman, and that Mrs. Sanford's recital of the trouble was a finished calumny at Marion's expense we are spared the necessity of asserting. In her few words

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written to her father that day, Miss Sanford simply said that she was going to pay a brief visit to the Zabriskies; but in less than a fortnight, with his full consent and a liberal allowance, she went with them abroad. That his experiences in his new marital relations were not blissful we may conjecture from the fact that he soon found reason to believe that he couldn't believe Mrs. Sanford. Unbelief grew to conviction and developed into profound distrust. Still, as she not infrequently had to remind him, she was his lawfully wedded wife, and held the fort. He aged rapidly, and his struggles for the mastery were futile. She was young, active, healthy, and wise as the serpent. He mourned for his absent daughter, and when, yielding to her own yearnings, she returned to America in the spring of the Centennial year, he sent for her to come to him. She went, and remained as long as she could, but in leaving, she told him, with eyes that filled and lips that quivered but never shrank, that it was her last visit so long as her step-mother remained beneath the roof, and he broke down and sobbed like a little child, but sought not to dissuade her.

"Her mother's fortune," said the Mrs. Grundys of Fort Hays, was now her own; but her mother had no fortune, and if she had, it would have been shared by the two other children. In the old days her father had laughingly bought and set aside for Marion's own account some government bonds and some railway stocks; the latter at time of purchase being practically drugs on the market. In fifteen years they were at a heavy premium. When it came to parting, he had placed these bonds with all their unclipped coupons to her

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credit at his banker's, and she was mistress of a little fortune it seemed to her, which, added to the liberal allowance he insisted on keeping up, gave her far more than she could ever spend on herself even were her tastes extravagant.

She dressed richly; she would have nothing that was not of the best, but she was never wasteful. It had been her habit to keep accurate account of her expenditure, and to send her father a quarterly balance-sheet that was a delight to his pragmatical eyes. He would have doubled her allowance her last two years at school, but she would not agree to it. She was in deep mourning and in sore distress, and money was the one thing she had no use for. All the same he paid it to her account, as he termed it, and in due time the money became her own. She had loved him dearly despite his rough exterior and what she thought his lack of appreciation of her gentle mother. But when he married the governess before that second winter's snow had mantled the hallowed grave, her soul rebelled in indignation and dismay. For a year her heart had held out against him, and softened only when she saw that he was breaking under the self-imposed burden,—a shrewish second wife. However, Mrs. Sanford "held the fort," as has been said, and Marion, high-spirited, sensitive, refined, and loving, was entering on her twentieth year—without a home.

Was she pretty? Yes. More than pretty, said those who knew her best. She was simply lovely. But alas for those to whom disappointment is sure to come, she was a decided blonde.

A fairer, lovelier, whiter skin than Marion Sanford's

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was rarely seen; her complexion was wellnigh faultless, her eyes were large, clear, full of thought and truth and expression, and in tint a deep, deep blue, shaded, like Grace Truscott's, with curling lashes, not so long, but thick and sweeping; her hair was too dark, perhaps, for the purity of her blond complexion. It was a shining, wavy brown, very soft, thick, and luxuriant. She would be far more striking, said her commentators, had she real blond hair, but those who grew to know her well soon lost sight of the defect. Her mouth was a trifle large, but her teeth were perfect, and the lips so soft, so sweetly curved, that one readily forgave the deviation from the strict rule of facial unity when watching her frequent smiles. In stature she was perhaps below, as Grace was above, the medium height of womanhood, but her figure was exquisite. Her neck and arms were a soft and creamy white, and the perfection of roundness and grace. "She must lace fearfully," was the invariable comment of the sisterhood on first acquaintance. In truth, she did not lace at all. It was a fault beyond her control, but her waist was perhaps too small. Her hands and feet were not like Grace's, long and slender. They were tiny, but her hand was plump and white and might be compressible. It was undeniably pretty, and her foot was always so stylishly shod that its shape was outlined most attractively.

But what would have made Marion Sanford attractive had she been simply plain instead of pretty, was her manner. Cold and unsympathetic had been the original school-girl verdict pronounced because of her distaste for imparting confidences. This was

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amended in her second year, abandoned in her third, and would have been attacked, if asserted, in her fourth. Over no girl's departure was there such frantic lamentation among the younger scholars as over Marion's. They had learned to love her. To all who were her elders there was gentle deference, to her equals and associates a frank and cordial bearing without degeneration into "confidences." To younger girls and to children Marion Sanford was an angel, the sweetest, the gentlest, the kindest, the most winning girl that lived. No matter who was with her, no matter what her occupation, for them she had ever smiles and sunshiny greeting. It was to her the younger girls soon learned to go in homesickness or troubles, sure of welcome to her arms and comfort in her sympathy; it was to her that the wee toddlers were never afraid to run for "sweeties," or refuge from pursuing nurse-maids; it was to her that girls of younger sets, accustomed to being snubbed and put down by those two years older, would yield the outspoken homage of loyal subjects. She was Queen Marion to the youngsters of the school, brave, wise, and, oh! so generous; while to the chosen few in the class, who knew something of her love for the heroic, she was Maid Marion, but only "Maidie" to one, her loyal and faithful ally, Grace.

She was still abroad in the fall of '75 when that quiet wedding took place which she was vainly implored to attend as first bridesmaid. Three years had elapsed since her mother's death, but her heart was still in mourning. But early in the spring of the Centennial year, after a stormy passage, she was safely

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restored to her own land, and the evening after the arrival of their party Captain and Mrs. Truscott were dining with them at the Clarendon. There had been a brief, a very brief call from her father and step-mother, and then she accepted Grace's invitation to come to them at the Point. A slight illness of Mr. Sanford's made it necessary to abandon the visit at the time, as she was telegraphed for before she had been forty-eight hours at the Point. The month that followed settled the question as to future relations with Mrs. Sanford. She would meet her father whenever or wherever he wanted except under that roof; on that point she was adamant, and he neither could nor did blame her. And so it resulted that she was once more with Grace and the "Admirable Crichton," as she had been accustomed to allude to him in her letters for the past year; and up to the moment of his return from the city he was the only hero who had appeared to her eyes in that manufacturing centre where the article is supposed to be turned out at the rate of fifty a year. It never had occurred to her that men so particular about the cut of their uniform trousers, the set of a "blouse," or the nice adjustment of the hair could by any possibility develop heroic qualities, and yet Captain Truscott always looked as though he had stepped out of a band-box.

It was late when she went to her room this lovely night in June. It was true that she had one or two letters to write, but they were very brief. She longed to have Grace come to her and tell her the result of her interview with Jack, and she longed to know what that letter would say. Never for an instant had it occurred

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to her that at a moment's notice a home could be abandoned, a young wife left to mourn, a delightful station left to anybody who wanted the place, and all as an every-day incident of army life. That such things could be expected and demanded in the midst of a mortal struggle for national honor was another matter entirely,—something to be encountered once in a lifetime, and something to be cherished in family tradition as grand, patriotic, heroic, and worthy of keeping in remembrance from generation to generation; but that to do all this merely as a piece of duty because one's particular regiment happened to be setting forth on probably hazardous service, but of a trivial nature as compared with the interests involved in the only war she heard much talked of, why, she never dreamed of such a possibility, and her ideas were no more vague than are those of the general public on precisely the same subject.

Twelve o'clock struck from the great bell over at the tower, and still Grace and her husband remained below. It was time—high time to go to bed, said Miss Sanford, though still perplexed, anxious, and distressed. Grace would surely come to her as soon as matters were decided. She stepped to her window to take a good-night look at the moonlit plain. Drawing aside the curtain, she peered through the blinds. Standing in silence at the front gate, leaning on the iron fence and gazing fixedly in the direction of the library window which opened toward the north, there appeared the figure of a man. A moment he stood there motionless, attentive. Then, without a sound, he swung back the gate, and quickly and almost on tiptoe, it seemed to her, stepped

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up the walk, passed through a broad, moonlit space, and was as quickly lost to sight and hearing around the corner of the house. She recognized the form and bearing at a glance. The man was Sergeant Wolf.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE FRONT.

RARE indeed is a day in June! Warmth and fragrance, sunshine and roses, strawberries, straw hats, summer costumes, music and moonlight, soft zephyrs, softer speeches, softest of swains have we left at the Point. Farewells—sweet, sad, sentimental some of them—have been said. The corps of cadets has gone to the Centennial with thousands of sight-seers from all over the nation. They hardly had dared hope for such an unaccustomed delight. They had not expected to go, but went. The nation flocks to Philadelphia, but out in the Northwest some hundreds of its defenders are flocking in another direction. Come with us and take another look at our old friends of the —th. They had expected to go, but didn't.

It is a rare, rare day in June, but where are the soft breezes, the sweet fragrance, the blossoms and the bliss of that month of months at the dear old Point? Rare indeed is the breeze, cloudless the sky, brilliant, beaming, magnificent, the sunshine, but not a leaf stirs in answering rustle to the wind. Far and near nc patch

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of shade delights or tempts the eye. Look where you will,—look for miles and miles over boundless expanse of rolling upland, of ridge and ravine, of dip and "divide," of butte and swale, no speck of foliage, no vision is there of even isolated tree. The solid earth beneath our feet is carpeted with dense little bunches of buffalo-grass, juicy, life-giving, yet bleaching already of the faint hues of green that came peeping through the last snows left in May. Tiny wild flowers purple the surface near us, but blend into the colorless effect of the general distance. We stand on a wave of petrified ocean, tumbling in wild upheaval close at hand; stretching away to the east in a league-long level flat as the barn floor of tradition, and bare as the description.

Far to the east the prairie rolls up to the horizon wave after wave till none is seen beyond. Far to the north, bare and treeless, too, the same effect is maintained. Far to the south, across an intervening lowland one would call a valley elsewhere, the ground rises against the sky, until its monotonous gray-green meets the gray-blue of the southern heaven; but west of south, what have we here? The farthest wave of prairie surges, not against the naked sky, but against a cold gray range, whose peaks and turrets are seamed and sprinkled with glistening snow. Aye, there they stand, the monarchs of the Rockies; there through the short summer sunshine their lofty crests defy the melting rays and bear their plumage through the very dog-days, to greet and welcome the first, faint, timid snow-flakes of the early fall. There they gleam and glisten, no longer as we saw them from the Kansas plains, dim in the western distance, unapproachable, but close at

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hand, neighborly, sheltering, for we nestle under their very shoulders. Here, to the west, just behind us, no great day's walk away and seemingly far nearer, in jagged outline against the blue of heaven, are the guardians of the old transcontinental pass. Here, to the west, where you see the rugged spurs jutting out from the range, runs the old trail which the engineers have followed, and carried the Union Pacific to its greatest altitude between the oceans. Far out there among the buttes runs that climbing ridge, yet it seems so close, so neighborly with the foreshortening of that strange scenery, that one cannot realize that in its climb it carries the iron rails still two thousand feet farther aloft. For years we have read of the Rockies, and is this possible? Do you mean that here, with this expanse of level prairie before us, we are up among the clouds, so to speak,—far up on the very backbone of the continent, and that is why, instead of towering thousands of feet aloft in air, the great peaks—Long's and Hahn's and Pike's—seem so near us to the south'ard and no higher at all? Aye, call it prairie level if you will, for straight to the east it looks as flat as Illinois, but we are standing six thousand feet higher in air than the highest steeple in Chicago, and our prairie flat is but the long, long slope of mountain-side that begins in the Black Hills of Wyoming—back at Cheyenne Pass—and ends at the forks of the Platte down near Julesburg.

You say it must be up-hill to that ridge that meets the horizon at the east. Is it? Look over here to our left front, a little to the northeast. See that tiny lake surrounded by low, wooden buildings, and approached

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by the hard, beaten road from the distant town. A pleasure resort of some kind, judging from the streamers and bright flags about the place. It stands on a hill, does it not? and the hill has risen gradually from the west, but slopes abruptly again to the east and south to the general level. Did you ever see a lake on a hill before? How does the water get there? Springs? No. Mark that slender rivulet that runs from far up the ravine at the southwest; it crosses the prairie in the near distance, and then goes twisting and turning up that apparent slope until it reaches the little lake on the hill. The outlet, you say? Yes. From here it certainly looks so, but step forward a few hundred feet and look at the rivulet, and by all that's marvellous! the water is running up-hill.

So it certainly seems, but the explanation is simple. The prairie is not horizontal by any means. It is a gradual but decided slope to the east, and the top of the little hill two miles away is forty feet lower than the point on which you stand.

Then how deceptive is the distance! Across the level to the southeast lies the bustling frontier city. You wonder to see glistening dome and spire far out there under the very shadow of the Rockies. At least you would have wondered a decade ago in the Centennial year. You note the transparency of the atmosphere. Science has told you that at such an altitude the air is rarefied. There is no light haze to soften outlines and to lend enchantment to a distant view. Roof, spire, chimney, all stand out clear and hard, and the coal-smoke from the railway blots the landscape where it rises, yet is quickly scattered by the mountain breeze.

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Between you and the little town lies the prairie over which the stage road runs straight and hard as a pike until, nearing us, it begins to twist and turn among the foot-hills for a climb across the ridge into the valley of Lodge Pole Creek beyond. Lodge Pole indeed! The creek valley has not a stick of timber far as one can see it. Follow it to its source, two days' trot or tramp up towards Cheyenne Pass, and there you find them, as the Sioux did twenty years ago, before we bade them seek their lodge-poles farther north. How far is it to the prairie metropolis,—a mile and a half, you venture? My friend, were you an artillerist, and were you to sight a two-hundred-pounder to throw a shell into Cheyenne from where we stand, "setting your sights for three thousand yards,"—more than your mile and a half,—the shell would rip up the prairie turf somewhere down there where you see the road crossing that *acequia*. Cheyenne lies a good four miles away, and is a good deal bigger than you take it to be. But here to the south lies a strange diamond-shaped enclosure,—a queer arrangement of ugly brown wooden barns and sheds far out all by itself on the bare bosom of the prairie. That is *called* a frontier fort. It is not a fort. It never has been. Even tradition cannot be summoned to warrant the name. It was built after our great civil war, and named for one of the gallant generals who fell fighting in the Shenandoah Valley. It has neither stockade nor simplest defensive work. It is all it can do to stand up against a "Cheyenne zephyr," and a shot fired at one end of it would go clean through to the other without meeting anything sufficiently solid to deflect it from its course. It is a fort by courtesy, as some

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of our non-conbatants are generals by brevet, and would be as valuable in time of defensive need. All around it, east, west, and north, sweeps the level prairie. South of its unenclosed limits there flows a rapid-running stream, down in whose barren valley are placed the long unsightly wooden stables, the big square corrals for quartermaster's stock, the huge stacks of hay and straw, and vast piles of cord-wood. Farther east along this tortuous stream, and on its left bank, too, midway between fort and city, is another big brown enclosure, in which are dozens of sheds and storehouses. It is a great supply depot for quartermaster's stores and ordnance, and over it, as over the fort, flutters the little patch of color which stamps the property as Uncle Sam's. For reasons that can soon be explained only small-sized flags are ever hoisted near Cheyenne. By noon of three hundred days a year, straight from the wild pass to the west, there comes sweeping down a gale that would snap the stoutest flag-staff into flinders, and that whips even a storm-flag threadbare in a few brief weeks.

But it is a rare June morning now, too early for the "zephyr," and nature beams and sparkles even over such bare landscape. The air is crisp, cool, invigorating. Far out on the slopes and side hills great herds of horses and mules are grazing, guarded by vigilant troopers, some alert in saddle, others prone upon the turf. Out along the road from town comes a train of white-covered wagons slowly crawling northward, with stores and supplies for the army up in the Indian country, and down here to our right front, covering the flat between fort and depot, blocked out in regular rows and

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groups, dotting the plain with gleaming canvas, is the camp of the —th regiment of cavalry. For the first time since the war of the rebellion two-thirds of its entire strength is massed under command of its senior officer.

Morning mounted drill is just over, and the two battalions, having unsaddled and turned the horses out to graze, are now busily occupied about the camp. The soft notes of the trumpet sounding "Officer's Call" has drawn to the colonel's tent a knot of tanned and athletic men in rough field uniform and bristling beards. Those who best know the —th will be quicker to recognize old friends in this guise than when in the glitter of parade uniform or the accurate and irreproachable evening dress of civilization. There is not a man in the group who is not quite at his ease in ball-room attire; most of them have held acquaintance time and again with the white tie and stiff "choker" of conventionality, but the average gallant of metropolitan circles would turn up his supercilious nostrils at the bare suggestion were he to see them now. The —th is in its element, however, for the order has come, and with the coming dawn it will be on the march for the Black Hills of Dakota, and the colonel has summoned the officers to his tent for some final instructions. It must be conceded that they look like business in their dark-blue flannel shirts, their "reinforced" riding-breeches, the substantial boots, and the field blouses and broad-brimmed campaign hats that Arizona suns and storms have long since robbed of gloss or freshness. The faces are strong and virile in almost every case. It is ten days since the razor has profaned a single chin, and very stubbly and ugly do they look, but long experience has

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taught them that the sooner the beard is allowed to sprout when actual campaigning is to be done the greater the eventual comfort. Occasionally some fellow draws off the rough leather gauntlet, and then the contrast between his blistered, wind-and-sun tanned face and the white hand is startling. Every man is girt with belt of stout make, and wears his revolver and hunting-knife,—the sabre is discarded by tacit consent,—its last appearance for many a long month. Some of the number, indeed, have taken the order to prepare for campaign work as a permit to doff the uniform entirely. Gruff old Stannard hates the blouse on general principles, and looks solid and "stocky" in his flannel shirt; not a vestige of "rank" can be found about him. Turner and old Wilkins, Crane and Hunter, are of his way of thinking, but others who preserve the military proprieties to the last are still garbed in the undress uniform coat. Perhaps they are thinking of the good-byes to be said in the garrison to-night. Less than twenty officers are there who report in answer to the signal, and, having saluted the colonel, dispose themselves on the few camp-stools or on the grass and wait for his remarks.

Some are old friends, and some old friends are absent. It is odd to think of the —th being here in force without Truscott, or Ray, or old Bucketts, the men we knew so well in Arizona. Colonel Pelham is, of course, not looked for: he is far too old to be in saddle on so hard a campaign as this promises to be. Truscott's troop is not yet here, but is under orders to remain in Kansas for the present, and he, we know, is far away at the Point. Ray, with one of the captains

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whom we have yet to meet, and with Mr. Gleason, is still detained on that horse board,—very reluctantly, too, fretting himself into a fever over it say some accounts, and other accounts say worse. Bucketts, as quartermaster, is behind at Hays gathering up the fragments that remain and shipping property to the new station. Captain Canker is here: he was East with his wife and little ones, vastly enjoying the surf at Cape May, when the telegram reached him saying that the —th were off for the wars again, and within twelve hours he was in pursuit. Four of the group now waiting around the colonel's tent came in just that way.

"Gentlemen," says the colonel, stepping quickly from the tent, "I called you here for a word or two. First, there will be forty new horses here at three this afternoon. They will be distributed according to color among the eight companies, five to each. See to it that they are shod first thing. There will be twenty in the next lot; they are to be left here for Webb and Truscott. Overhaul your ammunition and equipments at once, and if anything is lacking, you can draw from Cheyenne depot this afternoon. I presume those of you who are to take station at Russell will want to go over to see about your quarters, but my advice is that only those who have families make any selection: there will be some changes by the time we get back. We march at six in the morning, so have everything cleared up to-day. There will be no further drill. Those who have business to attend to in town or at the fort can leave camp without further permission. I shall remain here until we start, and one officer from each troop must be in camp, at stables, and during night. That's

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all, unless somebody has questions to ask." And the colonel looks inquiringly around.

Apparently nobody has, and the group breaks up. Some few of the older officers remained to talk over the prospects at the colonel's tent. Others went to the garrison to rejoin anxious wives and children, and to spend the last day with them in helping get things settled in the new army homes to which they had been so suddenly moved. A third party, "the youngsters," or junior officers, sauntered across the intervening stretch of prairie towards the low wooden building standing just north of the entrance-gate of the fort. In old army days 'twas known as "the sutler's." In modern parlance it is simply called "the store." The middle room of which, fitted up with a couple of old-fashioned billiard-tables, a huge coal stove, some rough benches, chairs, two or three round tables, and the inevitable bar and cigar-stand, bore on the portals the legend "officers'," as distinguished from the general "club-room" beyond.

Seated around the room in various attitudes of *ennui* and dejection were three or four infantry officers stationed at the post, while at one of the tables a trio of young lieutenants were killing time after morning drill in the fascination of "limited draw." Target practice, as now conducted, was then unknown, or there would have been no time to kill. The announcement languidly conveyed from the occupant of the window-seat, "A squad of the —th coming," produced neither sensation nor visible effect.

A minute more, however, and the door burst open, and in they came, half a dozen glowing, breezy, vigor-

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ous young cavalrymen, ruddy with health, elastic with open-air life and exercise, brimful of good spirits and cordiality, and headed by the declamatory Blake, who made a bee-line for the bar, shouting,—

"'An if a man did need a poison now,
Here lives a caitiff wretch would sell it him.'

His name's Muldoon, and he's a fluid man. Step out, Muldoon. What'll ye have, fellers?" he asked, with the sudden transition from the sublime to the ridiculous, which was one of Blake's delights. "Name your respective pizens, gentlemen. Come, join us, ye gallants of mud-crushers. What, ho! Poker?" and with one stride he was at the table and peering over the hands: "No use, Sammy,—

'Two queens with but a single ace,
Two sharps that beat as one.'

That's no hand to tackle a one-card draw with. Never you mind whether he's bluffing or not. There ain't enough in that pot to warrant the expense of testing the question. Take another deal. *What* did you say, Muldoon? Whiskey? No! Throw whiskey to the dogs; I'll none of it. Give me foaming lager. That's right, my doughboy ancient. Didn't I tell you to take another hand? What says the inimitable Pope?—

'Fair tresses man's imperial race ensnare,
And Sammy scoops us with a single pair.'"

"Good heavens! Blake. Give us a rest! Here,

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swallow your beer, or take something to choke you," laughed the victim at the table, while a chorus of groans saluted Blake's unconscionable parodies. "If you were to be here a week longer I vow I'd go mad. The best news I've heard in a year is that you're ordered to march in the morning. What quarters did you choose?"

"What difference does it make to you, Rags?" put in Mr. Dana. "You fellows will have the post to yourselves all summer, anyhow. We shan't get out so much as a chair until we come back from the campaign."

"Well, the married officers have chosen theirs, you know. Stannard's traps are all moved into No. 11, and they are pretty nearly settled already,—the carpets were all down yesterday. So they were at Turner's. Mrs. Whaling has been helping them unpack for the last three days, and telling everybody what they had and didn't have. I tell you what, fellows, we're going to have no end of a good time here this summer with your band and all the ladies while you're roughing it out on the Big Horn. Whaling says he'll bet a hat none of you get back before Thanksgiving."

"Is it so that Truscott comes here with his troop?" asked one of the captains of Lieutenant Crane.

"Well, the troop comes, but as to Truscott, that's another matter."

"I don't understand you, Crane," said Mr. Blake, with sudden change from his roystering manner. "I thought you heard Ray say that he knew Truscott would be after us as soon as it was settled that we would take the field."

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"Ray knew no more about it than you do, Blake," was the impatient reply. "Ray has a fashion of being oracular where Truscott is concerned as though he were on intimate and confidential terms with him. Now I, for one, don't believe he had any authority whatever for saying what he did."

"Well, hold on here," said Blake, deliberately. "My recollection is that Ray only spoke of it as his conviction,—not that Truscott had told him anything; still, he was certain that Truscott would come, and that he would lose no time in getting relieved either. You know he is at the Point," he said, in explanation, to the silent infantryman.

"Well, I'm d—d if I can understand it in him," muttered Wilkins, as he buried his broad face in a beer-mug.

"No, Wilkins, I dare say you can't," was the drawling reply, and the sarcasm was not lost among the listeners, though it missed its effect on the stolid object. "Truscott, Ray, Heath, and Wayne, and Canker, are not the style of men to spend this summer, of all others, away from the regiment."

"Well, here we are, marching to-morrow, and where are your Ray and Truscott?" asked Wilkins, with as near an approach to a sneer as he dare venture.

Blake rose quickly from his chair, near where the trio still continued their game, though by this time far more interested in the tone of the talk than in "ten-cent ante." Dana and Hunter, too, were flushing and looking ill at ease.

"This is no time or place to be discussing regimental matters," said he; "but since the matter has come to it,

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I mean to give what I believe to be the general opinion as opposed to that of a limited few. Crane, Wilkins, you are the only men I have heard express any doubts as to Truscott's coming, or Ray's, for that matter. I've got just fifty dollars here to bet against your ten that if this regiment has any fighting to do this summer they'll both be in it."

"I'm not making bets on any such event, Blake, and I did not mean to intimate that they were not apt to come," said Crane, conscious that he had been incautious.

"Well, you then, Wilkins," said Blake, impulsively. "I want this thing clinched. It is the third or fourth time I've heard you half sneering about these two men. It's bad enough in the regiment, but you are talking now in a bar-room and among outsiders. By Jove! if there's no other way, I say stop it."

There was an embarrassed silence. This was a new trait in Blake, one of the most jovial, whole-souled, rattle-brained fellows imaginable ordinarily, but now he seemed transformed. For years the regiment had been serving by itself. Now for the first time it was thrown into contact with the comparative strangers of the infantry. These gentlemen, too, were ill at ease at the suppressed feeling in the conversation, but Wilkins was "mulish" at times, and he had a reserve.

"If you know Truscott's coming it ain't fair to bet," he muttered, sulkily; "but you'd better go slow on backing Ray; that's my advice, Blake, unless you've more money than you know what to do with."

"All the same, I stand by my bet. Do you take it?"

"Oh, dash your bet! Blake, I'm no betting man;

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but you'd better be certain what Ray's doing before you champion him so glibly. Perhaps I know more than you think."

Blake's face clouded a little.

"I don't like your hints, Wilkins. We all know, of course, that Ray has been wild and reckless many a time, but he is disbursing officer of that horse board; he is the man of all others on it to decide what they'll take and what they won't take. Buxton knows mighty little about horses and will vote as Ray does, so that leaves the responsibility with him. He never failed us yet, and, by gad! I don't believe he will now."

"All right! Blake, just you wait. All I've got to say is that if Ray wants to keep his skirts out of the mud he'd better quit the company of that fellow Rallston, and I hear he's with him day and night, and has done no little drinking and card-playing with him already. *I* don't say gambling, but there's those that do," continued Wilkins, hotly.

"More than that," he went on, after a pause. "When Wayne came through Kansas City, Gleason and Buxton were at the train to meet him, but they didn't know, they said, where Ray was. *I* heard he was at the hotel sick; been on a tear, I suppose."

"See here, Wilkins, unless you can prove it let up on this sort of talk. Ray told Stannard when he went on this detail that he would touch no card so long as he was disbursing officer, and that he'd let John Barleycorn alone. Now, do you know he has been on any spree?"

"No, I don't know it, Blake, and yet I'm certain of it just from past experience with him."

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"By gad! you're as bad as old Backbite himself. Do you remember that time Chip of the artillery was walking down Nassau Street, and a steam-boiler or something burst under the sidewalk and broke his leg? The first thing old Backbite said when he heard of it was, 'H'm! been drinking, I suppose.' Now here's Billings with a despatch. What is it, bully rook?" he hailed, as the adjutant came bounding in.

"Truscott starts to-night, and the horse board will break up next week, so we'll have Jack and Ray with us inside of ten days."

"*Pre*cisely. Now, Wilkins, if you want a nice mud-bath for your head, there's an elegant spot back of the stables. Come on, Billings, I'm going to camp."

And with that he left, followed by all the cavalrymen but Wilkins and his associate Crane. The latter held the ground, and, as they were plainly the defeated parties in the argument so far, human nature demanded that Mr. Wilkins should set himself right in the eyes of the reluctant auditors, and so it happened that among the officers composing what might be termed the permanent garrison of the post the first impressions received of Mr. Ray were conveyed by a tongue as ill regulated as—other people's children.

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CHAPTER VII.

WAR RUMORS.

THE announcement that Captain Truscott had gone to Washington was received at the officers' mess with no little excitement. Questioned as to the meaning of it, the commandant of cadets unreservedly replied that Truscott would not risk failure, but, with the full permission of the superintendent, had gone to see the Secretary of War and get immediate orders to join his regiment. The —th was to take the field at once, said the colonel, and Truscott felt that it was his duty to go. Things looked very much as though there would be a stubborn and protracted Indian war, and undoubtedly the captain was right in his view of the matter. In this opinion there was general acquiescence among the staff and artillery officers present,—it is always safe to adhere to general principles which are not apt to be personal in their application, and the staff and artillery rarely were called upon to take part in such hostilities,—and Mr. Ferris being a cavalryman of spirit was quite disposed to think it the proper thing for him, too, to ask for orders, although the possibility of his regiment's being involved was indeed remote. One or two officers, however, maintained that the principle was bad as a precedent; that hereafter officers might feel it a reflection upon them if they did not immediately ask to be sent to their commands on the first rumor of hostilities, no matter how important might be the duties upon

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which they were detached. On this view of the case very little was said, but one or two gentlemen whose regiments were known to be marching on the Yellowstone country looked gratefully at the originator and nodded their heads appreciatively. It was mid June now, and except the fight with Crazy Horse's band on Patrick's Day and an unimportant brush with the Sioux on the head-waters of the Tongue River, nothing that could be called "hostilities" had really taken place. "The Indians will be surrounded and will surrender without a blow," said those who sought for reason to evade going; but no man who knew anything of Indian character or Indian methods believed that for an instant. Every experienced officer knew, and knew well, that a mortal struggle must come and come soon, and come it did.

But Jack Truscott needed no such spur to urge him on the path of duty. What it cost to cut loose from all that was so beautiful to him in his happy home no one ever knew. What it cost his brave young wife to let him go was never told. Barely half a year had they rejoiced together in their love-lit surroundings, the most envied couple at the Point,—and there is vast comfort in being envied,—and Grace Truscott had never for an instant dreamed that so rude an interruption could come; but come it had, with blinding, sudden force, that for a time stunned and wellnigh crushed her. Jack had lifted her in his strong arms and almost carried her to their room the night when he *had* to tell her of his determination, but, once satisfied that his duty was plain, she rallied, like the soldier's daughter she was, and spoke no word of repining. She looked up in his

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eyes and bade him go. True, she cherished faint hope that in Washington there would be attempt to dissuade him, for she had good reason to know that in the days whereof we write there were officials of the War Department who regarded Indian warfare on the frontier as a matter quite beneath their notice,—one which might of course concern the officers and men actually engaged, but that could be of small moment to the Army,—that is, the Army as known to society, as known to the press, and, 'tis to be feared, as understood by Congress,—the Army in its exclusive and somewhat supercilious existence at the National Capital. Colonel and Mrs. Pelham were there, and Jack would of course see them; and was it not possible that there would be officials of the highest authority who could convince him that his services were not needed at the front, but could not be dispensed with at the Point? Poor Grace! She little dreamed that for such a place as her husband held there were dozens of applicants, and that senators and representatives by the score had favorites and friends whom they were eager to urge for every Eastern detail; and then, even now she did not entirely know her Jack: so gentle, loving, caressing, as he was with her, she could hardly realize the inflexibility of his purpose. The interview with the Secretary of War was over in five minutes, and never had that functionary experienced such a surprise. He had received Captain Truscott's card and directed that he be admitted, vaguely remembering him as the tall cavalry officer whom he had seen at the Point on the first of the month, and whom, after the manner of his kind, he had begged "to let him know if there should ever be anything he could do for

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him in Washington," and now here he was, and had a favor to ask. The Secretary sighed and looked up drearily from his papers, but rose and shook hands with the young officer who entered, and blandly asked him to be seated. Captain Truscott, however, bowed his thanks, said that he had just left the adjutant-general, and had his full permission to present in person this note from the superintendent of the Academy, and his, the captain's, request to be immediately relieved from duty at West Point with orders to join his regiment, then *en route* to reinforce General Crook.

The Secretary mechanically took the note between his nerveless fingers, and simply stared at his visitor. At last he broke forth,—

"By the Eternal!" (and the administration was not Jacksonian either) "Captain Truscott. This beats anything in my experience. Since I've been in office every man who has called upon me has wanted orders for himself or somebody else to come East. Do you mean you want to go West and rejoin your regiment to do more of this Indian fighting?"

"Certainly, Mr. Secretary," was Truscott's half-amused reply.

"It shall be as you wish, of course," said the cabinet officer; "but I've no words to say how I appreciate it. You seem to be of a different kind of timber from those fellows who are always hanging around Washington,—not but what they are all very necessary, and that sort of thing," put in the Secretary, diplomatically; "but we have no end of men who want to come to Washington. You're the first man I've heard of who wanted to go. By Jove! Captain Truscott. Is

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there anything else you want? Is there anything I can do that will convey to you my appreciation of your course?"

"Well, sir, I have spoken to the adjutant-general about some six men of the cavalry detachment at the Point who are eager to go to the frontier for active service. If they could be transferred,—sent out with recruits; we are short-handed in the —th, and my own troop needs non-commissioned officers."

"Certainly it can be done. We'll see General T—— about it at once."

That night Grace's last hope was broken by the telegram from Washington, which told her that Jack would be home next day and that the orders were issued.

Mrs. Pelham had stormed, of course, that is—to her husband. She stood in awe of Jack, and had counted on spending much of the summer at the Point. Living as they were at a Washington hotel, expenses were very heavy, and madame had planned to recuperate her exhausted frame and fortune in a long visit to dear Grace, who really ought to have a mother's—"well, at least, if the captain is to be away so much of the time, she will surely be lonely," madame had argued. It was really quite fortunate that he had to go to Kentucky to buy horses. In his absence she might recover much of the ground she felt she had lost in the last year. The plan was fairly developed in her strategical mind, when who should appear but the captain himself, and with the brief announcement that they would start for Wyoming in a week.

Madame could not believe her senses; but either from shock or unusually profound discretion, she re-

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frained from an expression of her sentiments, and Truscott continued his calm explanation. Grace had borne up bravely at the idea of his throwing away the detail at the Point, but had made one stipulation. She should go with him to the frontier, rebuild their nest at the new station of his troop, and be near him as woman could be during the summer's campaign, and all ready to welcome him home at its close. He could not say her nay. Old Pelham's eyes brimmed with tears, but when he spoke it was only to repress the impetuous outbreak of his wife.

"Now, Dolly, no words. Truscott's right, so is Grace. It's bound to be a sharp campaign no matter what your society friends say. By gad! I'd—I'd give *anything* to go, but I'm too old, Jack; I'd only be in the way. You're right, my boy. You're right; you always are. Your place is with the regiment when there's work to be done, and Grace is a soldier's wife. She's right, too. Her place is near him."

In vain Mrs. Pelham argued that Grace could better remain East. Jack knew his wife's mind. She would be just as comfortable; she would be far happier in the cosey quarters of the big garrison at Russell. She would have Mrs. Stannard, whom they all loved, for friend and companion, and there were a dozen pleasant acquaintances among the ladies there to be quartered. It was simply useless for madame to interpose. Everything had been settled beforehand and without reference to her. The best they could do was to accept Jack's invitation to come to the Point, be his guests at the hotel, and see them off. He would dismantle his quarters forthwith.

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And when he returned to Grace next day she was brave, smiling, really happy. She gloried in the idea of going with her soldier husband back to the dear old —th, and she had another plan,—a surprise. She and Marion had had a long talk, and as a result Marion wanted to go too. It was novel. It was almost startling, yet—why not? Several young ladies were already visiting at Hays,—two of them were going,—had gone to Russell with relatives who were married in the —th. Miss Sanford was to have spent the summer with them at the Point. Why should she not accompany Grace to Wyoming and see something of that odd army life of which she had heard so much. If Captain Truscott would have her she knew no reason to prevent. And they all knew that in the captain's enforced absence on the campaign no one could be so great a comfort, so dear a companion to Grace, as her schoolmate Marion. There was only one question, said Truscott, "Will Mr. Sanford consent?"

"I will write to-night," said the young lady, in reply, "and I feel confident of his answer."

Within a week, as we know, the telegram had reached the —th announcing Truscott's move, and that very afternoon Mrs. Stannard, seated on the piazza of her new quarters and gazing southward across the bare parade to the dun-colored barracks on the other side and the snow-capped peaks of Colorado seemingly just beyond, was startled by a sudden sensation in the group of officers in front of Colonel Whaling's. Another telegram. Presently her husband left the group and came quickly to her, hands in his pockets as usual, and with his customary expression of unastonishable

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nonchalance. Still, she saw he had disturbing news, and she rose anxiously to meet him, her sweet blue eyes clouded with the dread she strove to repress.

"What is it, Luce?" she asked.

The major unpursed his lips and abandoned the attempted whistle.

"Been a fight—way up on the Rosebud," he briefly said, as he dropped into a chair, still maintaining his apparent indifference of manner.

"Yes; but—what was it? Who is hurt this time?"

"H——, of the Third; shot through the face; can't live, they say. Reckon that isn't the worst of it, either. Crook found the Indians far too many for him and he had to fall back to his camps."

"Oh, Luce! Then it will be a hard campaign. What news for the —th?"

"Nothing as yet. We march, of course, at daybreak, and I suppose the rest of the regiment will be hurried up from Kansas. What must be looked after at once is the great mass of Indians at the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail reservations on White River. They will get this news within the next twenty-four hours, and it will so embolden them that the entire gang will probably take the war-path. There is where we will be sent, I fancy. Orders will reach us at Laramie. They say Sheridan himself is on his way to the reservations to look into matters. Mrs. Turner been here?" he suddenly asked, with a quick glance from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"Mrs. Turner? Not since morning. Why?"

"There was a sort of snarl down at the store this morning. Some mention of it was made while we were

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talking there at Whaling's, and I was anxious to get the particulars. Wilkins was saying something about Ray that worries me. Have you heard nothing?"

"Not a thing, Luce. Did you suppose Mrs. Turner was possessed of all the information and would come to me with it?"

The major looked uncomfortable. "She would be apt to go to somebody, and you were the nearest. Both those youngsters, Dana and Hunter, were present, and they are leaky vessels, I'm told. Turner never tells her anything, but the boys do."

"What a thing to say, Luce!"

"Can't help it," growled the major, thrusting out his spurred boot-heels towards the railing and tilting back in his chair. "You never heard, I suppose, that between her and Mrs. Raymond and Mrs. Wilkins there was a regular intelligence bureau at Sandy two years ago. So you heard nothing about this affair?"

"Not a word; and it occurs to me, Major Stannard, that you look vastly as though you wish Mrs. Turner *had* come with the details. That's just the way with you men. You rail at our sex for gossiping, and growl when we can't or won't tell you anything. Luce! Luce! How consistent!" And in her enjoyment of her burly lord's discomfiture, Mrs. Stannard forgot for the moment her many anxieties and laughed blithely.

The major had too much to worry him, however, and this was so evident to his devoted wife that her laugh was brief,—it was never loud or strident,—and she moved her chair nearer to his own.

"Is Mr. Ray in any trouble?" she asked, with genuine concern.

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"I don't know. Of the officers present at the conversation in the store this morning all I have since seen were infantrymen, whom I couldn't ask. Wayne and Merrill heard something of it and came to me at once because of their regard for Ray, but Blake has gone to town. He is the man who snubbed Crane and Wilkins. It seems Wilkins claims to have a letter from somebody—that man Gleason probably—to the effect that Ray has been on a perpetual tear with the very man of all others I dreaded his meeting. You remember that contractor, Rallston."

"Mr. Ray's brother-in-law?"

"Yes; worse luck! I knew the fellow by reputation before we went to Arizona. He's a scoundrel, and a very polished one, too. Ray is smart enough ordinarily, but if Rallston has been trying to sell him horses there will be trouble sooner or later. I'm more worried about that than over the campaign news. Sorry about H——, of course, though I'd never met him: They say he is a capital officer; but I can't start tomorrow and have this thing haunting me all the way up to Laramie. I'll go down to camp and hunt up Wilkins, and ask him flat-footed for his whole story; then there will be time to write to Ray, or telegraph if need be."

That was a dreary night at Russell. All the afternoon the telegraph instrument at headquarters was clicking away with details of the brief and sudden fight upon the Rosebud, and the officers read in silence the description of the hordes upon hordes of savages that swooped down upon Crook's little column, and whirled his allied Absarakás and Shoshones off the wooded

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bluffs. "They must have been reinforced from every reservation between the Missouri and the mountains," was the comment, for the whole country swarmed with them. Scout after scout had been sent out to strive to push through to the Yellowstone and communicate with General Terry's forces, known to be concentrated at the mouth of the Tongue. Some had come back, chased in to the very guard by yelling "hostiles." Several had failed to return at all, but—significant fact—none had succeeded in getting through. The last of June would soon be at hand; the forces that were to co-operate—Crook's from the Big Horn foot-hills at the south, Terry's from the banks of the Yellowstone at the north—had reached their appointed stations and even gone beyond, but not a vestige of communication could they establish one with the other. Crook, striving to force his way through from his corrals and camps, had been overpowered and thrust back by the concentration upon him of five times his weight in foes. Terry, sending his cavalry scouting up the Rosebud, found an unimpeded passage for miles and miles; and even as our friends at Russell were reading with gloomy faces the tidings from the front, a little battalion of cavalry, pushing venturously up the wild and picturesque valley, came suddenly upon a sight that bade their leader pause.

Up from among the wild rose-bushes along the sparkling stream, and climbing the great "divide" to the west, there ran a broad, new-beaten, dusty trail, pounded by the hoofs of ten thousand ponies, strewn on every side with abandoned lodge-poles, worn-out blankets, or other *impedimenta*, malodorous, unsightly.

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"The Indians have crossed to the Little Horn within the last three days," said the experienced scouts in the advance. Back went the column down the valley to report the news, and three days afterwards two war-tried regiments of horse were *en route.* From the south, heading for the Black Hills of Dakota, with orders to find the trail leading from the reservations to the Indian country and put a stop to the forwarding of reinforcements or supplies, rode our old Arizona acquaintances of the —th. From the north, pushing up the Rosebud into the very heart of the hostile regions, with orders to find the lurking-place of the swarming savages and "hold them" from the east, there came a command and a commander famed in song and story. Between them and the Big Horn heights and cañons, where lay the comrade force of Crook, there rolled a glorious tract of wooded crest, of sweeping, upland prairie, of deep and sheltered valley, of plashing stream and foaming torrent, and there in their guarded fastness, exulting in their strength, mad with rejoicing over their easy victory, lighting the valley for miles with their council-fires, rousing the echoes with triumphant shout and speech, thousand upon thousand gathered the Indian foemen, "covering the hills like a red cloud."

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CHAPTER VIII.

AT RUSSELL.

"WHAT do you think!" exclaimed Mrs. Turner, breathlessly, as she rushed in upon her friend Mrs. Stannard one bright morning a week later, "Mrs. Truscott and Miss Sanford will both be here to-morrow. Mr. Gleason escorts them. Why!" she added, in visible disappointment, "you knew all about it all the time. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I only knew yesterday, Mrs. Turner," was the smiling reply. "They will stay with me until their quarters are ready. Captain Truscott and Captain Webb will camp here with their troops until further orders, and you knew, of course, that they were on their way. The ladies were to have gone to the hotel in town, but Major Stannard sent word before he left that Mrs. Truscott must come to me, and I have plenty of room for Miss Sanford, too."

"Won't it be delightful to have them? It will add ever so much to the life of the post," said Mrs. Turner, with visions of hops and parties innumerable flitting through her pretty head. It was a week since the —th had broken camp and marched away. Already they were far across the Platte and up out of reach of all telegraphic communication somewhere among the breaks of the South Cheyenne, and right in among the bands now known to be hurrying day and night, northwest-

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ward, to join the hordes of Sitting Bull. Captain Turner had been unusually grave in parting with his wife, but that blissfully constituted matron had shed few tears. She was philosophic and sensible beyond question. What good was there in borrowing trouble? Didn't the captain have to go time and again just the same way in Arizona, and didn't he always come back safely? Of course, poor Captain Tanner and Captain Squires, and Mr. Clay and Mr. Walters and others, had been killed, and lots of them were wounded at one time or another; but heavens! if one had to go into deep mourning every time a husband had to take the field, there would be no living in the cavalry at all! Mrs. Turner was unquestionably sensible, and far be it from our intention to upbraid her. Ladies there were in the —th who spent several days in prayers and tears after they had seen the last of the guidons as they fluttered away over the "divide" towards Lodge Pole, and with these afflicted ones Mrs. Whaling, the "commanding officer's lady," would fain have lavished hours of time in sympathizing converse. She loved the melodramatic, and was never so happy, said Blake, as when bathed in tears. Detractors of this estimable woman, indeed, were wont to complain that she was too easily content with these pearly but insufficient aids to lavatory process; and her propensity for adhering for weeks at a time to an ancient black silk, which had seen service all over the Western frontier, gave sombre color to the statement. The few ladies of the —th who had come to Russell for the summer were hardly settled in their new quarters when the regiment was hurried away, and from one house to another had

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Mrs. Whaling flitted, a substantial and seemingly well-fed matron in appearance, and one whose eccentricities of costume and toilet were attributable, no doubt, to a largeness of nature, which rendered all care for personal appearance subordinate to the claims of afflicted humanity. All the ladies had gracefully accepted her proffered sympathy, and some had warmly thanked her for the well-meant attentions; but Mrs. Turner was completely nonplussed by the good lady's offer to come and pray with her, and it must be allowed that Mrs. Whaling's visit of condolence had been productive of far more comfort to Mrs. Turner than was expected,—and in a far different way; for that volatile young matron rushed in upon Mrs. Stannard late in the afternoon, choking with laughter, to describe her sensations in striving to be proper and decorous until the venerable black silk had whisked itself off out of hearing. Three days after the —th had gone the band arrived from Hays. Mr. Billings had spent two days at the post in seeing his men comfortably established and in turning over property to the infantry officer designated to be post adjutant, and then he had taken stage to Laramie and gone in chase. That evening, after the band had played delightfully an hour or two on the parade, the officers suggested an informal dance; their own ladies went readily, and Mrs. Turner decided to go and see the hop-room, and once there it seemed so poky to come away without a waltz or two. "The floor was lovely, so much better than ours at Hays, and really, several of the garrison officers danced remarkably well." So we infer Mrs. Turner had satisfied herself by personal experiment on that score. Very properly, the

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informal hops became regular features of the garrison life, and several ladies of the —th, "grass-widowed" for the summer, were speedily induced to join in these modulated gayeties. What with the band, the influx of some half a dozen new ladies, and the constant arrival of officers *en route* to the front, the garrison not unnaturally remarked that Russell was jollier now that the —th had gone than it was before.

And now Mrs. Truscott and the very interesting Miss Sanford were coming. This was indeed news! They were to take quarters next to the Stannards, and be Mrs. Stannard's guests until the furniture arrived and all was made ready for them. Truscott's troop, with Webb's, was coming along by rail fast as they could travel in the heavy freight-trains to which they were assigned, and the ladies, Mrs. Webb included, were being escorted on the express direct to Cheyenne by Lieutenant Gleason, who had joined the party as they passed through Kansas City, and who had, doubtless, made himself especially agreeable to the young and lovely Mrs. Truscott, of whom he had heard so much, and to her friend, the heiress from New Jersey. These were details of which Mrs. Turner was in ignorance when she came in to surprise Mrs. Stannard with the news, and, after her first astonishment, Mrs. Turner's sensations were not those of unmixed delight. A whole day, it seemed, had the major's wife been in possession of the tidings and had not imparted them to her. This was indicative of one of two things: either Mrs. Stannard was so reticent that she did not care to tell anybody, or else she had told others and kept it from her,—from her who believed that she had made a most favor-

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able impression on this charming and popular lady of whom all men and most women spoke so admiringly. Mrs. Turner's face betrayed her mental perturbation, and Mrs. Stannard was quick to divine the cause. In genuine kindness of heart she came promptly to the relief of her pretty friend. Without being in the least blind to her frivolities, Mrs. Stannard saw much that was attractive and pleasant in Mrs. Turner. She was vastly entertained by her, and enjoyed studying her as she would a graceful statue or a finished picture. Beneath the surface she had no desire to penetrate. Warm friends and loving friends she had in troops, and women of Mrs. Turner's mental calibre were sources of infinite, though quiet, entertainment. She enjoyed their presence, was cordial, kindly, even laughingly familiar, yet always guarded. Mrs. Stannard's most pronounced characteristic was consummate discretion. She knew whom to trust, and others might labor in vain to extract from her the faintest hint that, repeated carelessly or maliciously, would wound or injure a friend.

But here was a thing all the world might know. Truscott's telegram had reached her the evening before, saying that the three ladies, escorted by Lieutenant Gleason, would arrive at such a time, and that Mrs. Truscott and Miss Sanford would gladly accept her offer. The average woman could hardly restrain herself from going out and seeking some one to whom to tell the interesting news. Few pleasures in life are keener than the bliss of being able to convey unexpected tidings,—when they are welcome,—but Mrs. Stannard knew that the ladies of the regiment with whom she felt at all intimate were over at the hop-room. She had

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all a woman's eagerness to tell the news, but—she was loyal to the —th, and would not even in so little a thing let others be the bearers. That Mrs. Stannard was a woman capable of deeds of heroism we deduce from the simple fact that she went to bed that night without having breathed the story to a soul. She had a strong impulse to tell her cook and housemaid,—old and reliable followers of her fortunes,—but she well knew that those amiable domestics would be clattering up and down the back yards all the evening, and the news would surprise nobody when she came to tell it next day. She was too true a woman to want to part with such a pleasure. Then she had—ah! must it be confessed?—a little mischievous desire of her own to see how Mrs. Turner would take it, for those who knew Mrs. Turner best were given to the belief that she would far rather have the attention of the masculine element of the garrison concentrated upon herself than shared with such undoubted rivals as these would be; and so, with perfect truth, Mrs. Stannard's reassurance took the form of these words:

"You see I could not make up my mind to let any one know until I had told you, and I've been expecting you all the morning,"—and Mrs. Turner was charmed. "But," said Mrs. Stannard, "tell me how you heard it. I thought no one knew it but myself."

"Oh! Mr. Gleason telegraphed as a matter of course, to announce that *he* was escorting these ladies. It was quite a feather in his cap to be able to show the commanding officer here that Captain Truscott intrusts to him the duty of guarding anything so precious. When you get to know Mr. Gleason better you'll appreciate

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that," said Mrs. Turner, with a pout. "Captain Turner can't bear him, and dislikes to have me notice him at all; and what I wonder at is his escorting them. Why is he not with his company? And where is Mr. Ray? If the board has adjourned, I should suppose that Mr. Gleason would be on duty with his men,—he is Truscott's first lieutenant, you know,—and that Mr. Ray would be rushing through to catch *his* company. Why isn't he escorting them I wonder? Perhaps Captain Truscott had reasons of his own for not permitting that,—Ray *was* smitten with her, I don't care what Mrs. Raymond says. Have you heard where Mr. Ray is?"

"Not a word. I wish I knew," said Mrs. Stannard, wistfully.

"Have you—have you heard anything about his being in any trouble, in anything likely to keep him from going with the regiment?" asked Mrs. Turner, hesitatingly, yet watching closely Mrs. Stannard's face.

"Nothing in the least that is anything more than a very improbable story, and one that I have too little faith in to repeat. Tell me what news you have from the captain." And Mrs. Turner knew 'twas useless to ask questions. She hurried through her visit, and tripped eagerly away up the row to carry the news throughout the garrison, meeting Mrs. Whaling coming down, and the latter had the start.

And so, before the setting of a second sun, Grace Truscott was once more in garrison, and Miss Sanford, with quietly observant eyes, was forming her first impressions of army life in the far West, and welcoming with sweet and gracious manner the ladies, who could

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not resist their hospitable impulse to gather on Mrs. Stannard's piazza and greet the new-comers as soon as they had removed the dust and cinders of railway travel, and in the bewildering freshness of their New York costumes reappeared on the parlor floor.

That evening, of course, they held quite a levee. The band played delightfully upon the parade, welcoming back to the frontier the colonel's daughter, and wishing, many of them, that old Catnip, too, had come, for he was very thoughtful and kind to his men, and they were realizing that it is no fun to be musicians for somebody else's regiment. Many officers and ladies called, and Mrs. Stannard's pleasant parlor was filled from early until late. One man appeared there before anybody else, accepted an invitation to join them at dinner and stayed until after eleven: this was Mr. Gleason.

The sunshine of Mrs. Stannard's bonny face was something the —th were prone to speak of very often, perhaps too often to suit other ladies, whose visages on the domestic side were not infrequently clouded. Just as it is an unsafe thing to speak in presence of some mothers of the grace or beauty or behavior of other children than their own, so it is simply idiotic to talk of Mrs. So-and-so's sweet manners or sweeter face to Mrs. Vinaigre, who is said, at times, to be snappish. It may be far from your intention to institute comparisons or to refer, by inference, to graces which are lacking in the lady to whom you speak, but there is nothing surer in life than that you get the credit of it in the fullest sense, and that, most unwittingly, you have affronted a woman in a way the meekest Christian

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of her sex will find it hard to forgive; she will never forget it. Mrs. Stannard's smile was sweetness itself; her eyes smiled quite as much as her mouth, and her very soul seemed to beam through the winsome, winning beauty of her face. All the young officers looked up to her with something akin to worship; all the elders spoke of Mrs. Stannard as the perfection of an army wife; even her closest friends and acquaintances could find no one trait to speak of openly as a fault. The nearest approach to such a thing was Mrs. Turner's exasperated and petulant outbreak when her patient lord had ventured, in presence of several of her coterie, to speak once too often of that lovely smile. "Merciful powers! Captain Turner. Any woman with Mrs. Stannard's teeth could afford to smile from morning till night; but it's all teeth!" But even Mrs. Turner knew better. It was a smile born of genuine goodness, of charity, of loving-kindness, and of a spiritual grace that made Mrs. Stannard marked among her associates. In all the regiment no woman was so looked up to and loved as she.

Grace Truscott had known her well by reputation, though this was their first meeting. It seemed not a little strange to Miss Sanford that they should be going thus suddenly and unceremoniously to be the guests of a lady whom neither of them had ever seen, but "'tis the way we have in the Army," was the laughing response when she ventured to speak of it, and any hesitancy or embarrassment she might have felt vanished at the instant when their hostess appeared on the piazza and both her hands were outstretched in welcome. "Did you ever see a lovelier expression in a woman's face?"

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was her first impulsive exclamation when she and Grace were shown to their rooms. Yet, once her guests were up-stairs and out of the way, Mrs. Stannard's brow clouded not a little as she descended to the piazza, where she had left Mr. Gleason superintending the unloading of trunks, boxes, and other baggage, and giving directions about the distribution of this thing or that quite as though "one of the family." She had never liked him; the major cordially hated him; she knew that Captain Truscott could not possibly feel any friendship for such a man, and yet here he was, the escort of Mrs. Truscott and Miss Sanford on their journey. They were her guests, and therefore she had to be unusually civil to him. One or two officers came up to speak to him as he stood at the little gate, and the post adjutant invited him to send his traps to his quarters. where a room was ready. Gleason looked around at Mrs. Stannard and remarked, "Well, I'm much obliged, but you see I'm rather bound as yet to our ladies," and plainly intimated that he hoped Mrs. Stannard would offer him the spare room on the parlor floor, but Mrs. Stannard did nothing of the kind; and, not very gracefully, he availed himself of the young infantryman's courtesy. The baggage was all in by this time, and there was no need of his prolonging his stay. Mrs. Stannard, of course, announced that they expected the pleasure of his company at dinner at six, and asked him to come in and rest, unless he preferred to go at once and dress. Gleason concluded it best to go, but, in the hearing and presence of the garrison officers who were standing near, begged Mrs. Stannard to explain to the ladies that he had to report to the commanding

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officer, and would she please say to Miss Sanford that he would call at five?

What could that mean? was Mrs. Stannard's vexed inquiry of her inner consciousness. Was the widower bent on making the most of his time in an endeavor to fascinate the Eastern belle? The ladies were hardly dressed when he reappeared, and was urging Miss Sanford to come out with him for a brief stroll to see the mountain prairie and take a whiff of Wyoming breezes, when the appearance of Mrs. Turner and others (who had just happened by, but hearing their voices could not resist rushing in to welcome Mrs. Truscott, etc., etc.) put an end to the possibility. It was a comfort to note that though perfectly courteous and pleasant in her manner, even to the extent of that indefinable yet perceptible half intimacy which exists between travelling companions, Miss Sanford seemed in no wise encouraging and by no means displeased at the interruption to the plan so audaciously proposed. At dinner Mr. Gleason sat opposite the young lady, and was, therefore, obliged to talk much with Mrs. Stannard. After dinner he promptly established himself by Miss Sanford's side, showing her albums full of photographs of the officers,—a collection the major and his wife had been making for years, and one in which they took great delight. Gleason knew most of them, and it enabled him to be very entertaining, as he could tell some anecdote or incident connected with so many, but the early coming of visitors broke in upon his monopoly, yet could not wholly drive him from her side. It was observed by every man and woman who came in that evening how assiduous was Gleason in his attentions.

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More than that, there was something about them that can best be described by the word possessive. It seemed as though he had studied the art of behaving as though he felt that every look and word was welcome to her. Mrs. Stannard was secretly exasperated; Mrs. Truscott, who knew nothing of him until their westward journey, was only vaguely annoyed, but no one could tell from her manner what Miss Sanford thought.

It was after eleven when the last of the visitors withdrew, and still he lingered. Once more Miss Sanford stood by the centre-table and bent over one of the albums. She turned rapidly over the pages until she reached a cabinet picture of a dark-eyed, dark-haired, trim-built young officer in cavalry undress uniform.

"You did not tell me who this was, Mr. Gleason."

"That? Oh! That is Mr. Ray of our regiment," was the reply, in a tone lack-lustre of all interest.

"Mr. Ray? Where? Let me see," exclaimed Mrs. Truscott, coming quickly to them. "Oh, *isn't* that perfect? When did you get it, Mrs. Stannard? How mean of him not to send us one!"

"It was taken in Denver this spring," said Mrs. Stannard. "The major says it's the only picture he has ever seen of Mr. Ray, and it is as good as one can be that doesn't represent him in the saddle. You know we think him the best rider in the —th,—we ladies, that is," she added, knowing this to be one of Gleason's weak points. Mr. Gleason made no remark.

"What became of the other members of the board, Mr. Gleason?" she continued. "I expected to see Captain Buxton and Mr. Ray."

"Oh, they gave us all ten days' delay in joining so

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as to say good-by to friends, you know. Buxton stopped to see his wife's family at Leavenworth, but he'll be through here in a day or two." Then came a pause.

"And where is Mr. Ray? I supposed that he would be off like a shot."

There was an unmistakable sneer on Mr. Gleason's face, though the reply was vague and hesitating.

"Yes, Ray made no end of fuss about getting off—until the orders came; since then I haven't heard much—that is, I haven't seen anything of him."

"He couldn't well get to the regiment without going through here, could he?"

"No; but he hasn't gone, and he won't be going in any great hurry."

It was evident to Mrs. Stannard that Gleason was striving to be questioned. Whatever he knew he was ready to tell, provided some one would ask. Mrs. Truscott and Miss Sanford stood silently by, still looking at the photograph, when Mrs. Stannard again spoke.

"Well, Mr. Ray was never behind in any previous campaign, and I'll venture to predict he isn't far behind now. Now, Mr. Gleason, I'm going to send you home, for these ladies are tired out with their long journey."

He would fain have put in another word about Ray, but she was vigilant and checked him. He hoped for an invitation to breakfast, but it did not come. He plead with languishing eyes for a few moments more at the side of the lady he desired to fascinate, but Miss Sanford was still looking at the photographs and would not return his glance. Go he had to, and it was plain to him that in striving to belittle Ray he had damaged his own cause. It made him bitterer still as he strode

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through the darkness down to the beacon-lights of the store. Gleason drank more and talked more before he went to bed than was good for him; but no seed is so easily sown as that of slander.

CHAPTER IX.

RAY TO THE FRONT.

It has been said that Major Stannard told his wife that he proposed going down to camp, hunting up Mr. Wilkins, and getting from him "flat-footed" the authority he had for his insinuations at Mr. Ray's expense the day before the regiment marched for the Black Hills. The major went as he proposed; but at the very moment he reached camp the object of his search was unpacking Mrs. Wilkins's trunks up in the garrison. Stannard left word with the officer of the day that he wanted to see Mr. Wilkins on important business right after "retreat" (sunset) roll-call; and Wilkins was quick to divine that the major had already heard of his morning's mischief at the store. He stood in awe of the battalion commander, and knew well that when it came to a face to face encounter with him there could be no dodging. He must swallow his words or give his authority. Wilkins, therefore, had important business of his own or his able wife's devising which kept him from going to camp during the evening, and Stannard, being only the major, could not

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order him thither in the face of the colonel's permission to be absent. He trudged back across the prairie in no amiable mood, therefore, and swore in stalwart Anglo-Saxon to Captain Merrill that he would bring Wilkins to the scratch if he had to go to his quarters to do it. They looked in at the store, and Wilkins wasn't there, so together they walked up the row until they came to the cottage into which the lares and penates of the Wilkins family had so recently been carried, and Mrs. Wilkins herself met them at the door. She was afraid of nobody, and had doubtless been requested (he never directed) by her husband to see who was knocking. Now Mrs. Wilkins was as fond of Major Stannard as her husband was afraid of him. She liked his blunt, sturdy, unaffected ways, and many a time and oft she had held him up to her submissive lord as the sort of soldier he ought to be. She knew nothing of the affair at the store as yet, and Wilkins was afraid to tell her. With her keen insight she had long since discovered that her husband's associates and intimates in the regiment were not the strong or the good men, and she had warned him at Sandy that whatever he might have against such men as Truscott or Ray, he had better stamp it out and seek to re-establish himself in their good opinion. Such men as Gleason, with whom he consorted, would soon get him into trouble. Poor Wilkins heard the major's blunt salutation at the door and his wife's cordial invitation to walk in; but the major declined with thanks. "Ask Mr. Wilkins to come out here on the piazza, please; I want to see him on business," was his request; and when Mrs. Wilkins came puffing up-stairs supplement-

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ing the message with a "Hurry now; the major isn't the man for you to keep waiting," the hapless veteran wished himself anywhere out of Wyoming; but down he went with rather a hang-dog look. Stannard had met him with unexpected kindness of manner. "I'm worried about the story told of Ray, Mr. Wilkins, and I've come to get the authority from you. Of course you must have had something to base such statements upon," and being fairly cornered, Wilkins said his informant was Gleason. Being asked to show the letter, Wilkins declared that he had burned it, and would never have alluded to it but for Blake's manner, which he declared had goaded him into the remarks. Then he told Stannard that Gleason wrote in so many words that Ray was with Rallston night and day, and intimated that the latter kept him at cards and wine most of the time, and that if some scandal did not result when it came to paying for the horses he would be surprised. Still, he could not quote the language; but he gave his impressions. Stannard had called Merrill to witness the statement; then, giving Wilkins injunctions to say nothing more to anybody on the subject, and pledging Merrill to reticence, he had gone home, written brief and hurried letters to Ray and to Gleason, told his wife that he had heard the stories, and that until Ray had a chance to explain would regard them as baseless rumors, or at the worst as exaggerations, for which Gleason was responsible; then he had slept the sleep of the just until the corporal of the guard came banging at the door at four A.M. to say the reveille had sounded out in camp. Two hours later he had jogged away at the head of his battalion.

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Mr. Gleason's complacent acceptance of her reluctant invitation, and his evident expectation of more to come, were matters that therefore annoyed Mrs. Stannard not a little. She knew well that her husband had written him an angry letter, demanding that he either withdraw or substantiate the allegations he had made at the expense of Mr. Ray, but she had not been told what those allegations were. She felt certain that the letter had reached Mr. Gleason, for it was sent to the care of the commanding officer at Hays, yet here was the lieutenant himself, beaming with effusive cordiality. She felt more than certain that were "Luce" at the post Mr. Gleason would by no means be seeking to make himself at home in his quarters, but Luce with the eight companies of the —th was out of reach. Gleason was striving to make himself at home with her and her guests, and, as far as the latter were concerned, he had the sanction and apparent approval of Captain Truscott, whose name he incessantly quoted, as though the terms of intimacy between them were already established beyond peradventure.

"Truscott paid me one of the highest compliments I ever remember having received," said Mr. Gleason to the three ladies at dinner, and Mr. Gleason was a man who was always receiving compliments of one kind or another, if one could accept his statements. "He said that he had never seen the troop look so well as when I turned it over to him at Wallace." Now, as he had arrived at Wallace on the same train with the Truscotts, and did not "turn over" anything connected with the troop but the property returns, anybody acquainted with such matters would have known that Truscott's

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commendation, if bestowed at all, was probably given to the junior lieutenant, who had put the troop in handsome shape during the absence of Mr. Gleason on the horse board; but what Gleason aimed at was to make an impression on Miss Sanford's mind, since she could not be expected to know the intricacies of such matters. Mrs. Stannard would have been glad to correct the impression, but could not in courtesy to her guests, and so she remained silent. She meant, however, to discourage his visits in future, but he was too old a practitioner for her simple methods. She had slipped into the kitchen to see how nice a breakfast was being prepared for her guests the following morning, and in that brief absence he had appeared at the open door-way to urge the ladies to come out and see guard mounting. They were just down; the air was delicious out on the piazza, the band was inspiring; so what more natural than that Mrs. Truscott and Miss Sanford should make their first appearance that morning escorted by the obnoxious Gleason? When Mrs. Stannard came back from the kitchen they were all on the piazza, and others were strolling up the walk to join them. After the spirited little parade was over and the infantry officers had to go to the presence of their commander, Gleason lingered. He had no duties as yet, and—how could she avoid it, ladies?—Mrs. Stannard had to ask him if he had breakfasted when the maid came to announce that breakfast was served. He had; but it was easy for Gleason to say that he had merely sipped a cup of coffee and to insure the invitation he intended to extract. After breakfast she had her household duties to attend to, Mrs. Truscott had unpacking and other

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matters to look after. Miss Sanford felt that some one ought to entertain their late escort, and the duty fell to her. Garrison people who called that morning were edified by finding Mr. Gleason and Miss Sanford *tête-à-tête* in the parlor despite Mrs. Stannard's efforts. Mrs. Turner was promptly on hand, so were other ladies, and that they made certain inferences at the time, and compared notes later in the day, is, perhaps, supererogation to state.

On one pretext or another there was not an hour during that morning in which Mr. Gleason failed to appear at Major Stannard's quarters, and by two P.M., at which hour there was a gathering at the adjutant's office to await the distribution of the mail, it is not to be wondered at that one of Colonel Whaling's officers remarked to another that the cavalry seemed to have the inside track, if there was to be any race for the Jersey belle, and that others looked knowing when Gleason appeared to inquire if any letters had come for the ladies at Major Stannard's. There was no necessity whatever for his going, Mrs. Stannard protested. The orderly would bring the mail in five minutes if anything had come; but Gleason said that the orderly would have to stop in two or three houses before he got there, and he knew Mrs. Truscott was impatient,—and so she was. In a minute he was back with letters for all three, but Miss Sanford's was a mere note in reply to an order she had sent East, and while Mrs. Stannard and Mrs. Truscott retired to read the long letters that had come from their respective lords, once more Miss Sanford found herself entertaining the assiduous Gleason. She was beginning to think army life distasteful.

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Determined to break up this monopoly, the major's wife came speedily again to the parlor. Something she had read in her husband's letter had fired her with resentment against Gleason and nerved her to resolute measures. "Not a word of reply have I had from Ray," wrote Stannard, "nor has Gleason yet answered, though I know the letter was delivered to him. In conversation with Billings last night he admitted that he, too, had heard that Ray had been playing fast and loose at Kansas City, and when I asked him how it was brought to him, he replied that Wayne told him, and Wayne had a letter from Gleason. I wish Billings and Ray could have seen more of each other this spring; there is some feeling between them which I cannot fathom and do not understand. It will disappear when Ray joins us, for Billings cannot help admiring his energy and usefulness in actual campaign. As yet nothing of great interest has occurred, but everything points to wild excitement at the reservations. We are camping to-night at the Cardinal's Chair up on the Niobrara, and march northward to-morrow by way of Old Woman Fork to the Mini Pusa. General Sheridan's orders are to hide in the valley of the South Cheyenne, and keep a sharp watch on the trails crossing northwestward, and be ready to strike any and all parties of hostiles going up from the reservations on White River. Of course there will be sharp work. We have had two rushes already, for the Sioux have war-parties out robbing stock and running off horses from far south of the Platte, and a big band swept down the Chug Water within forty-five miles of you the very day we left Lodge Pole. 'K' went forward in pursuit, but they

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had too big a start. This letter goes by courier to Laramie to-night. Expect nothing more now for a week, as even the Black Hills stages have quit running. The Indians have driven off every white man between the Platte and the Yellowstone except those in the Black Hills settlements, and they are practically isolated. It was rumored that Webb and Truscott would be ordered forward to join us, and I suppose Buxton and Ray will take that opportunity of joining their companies. Should Mr. Gleason stay any time near Russell he will doubtless be inclined to cultivate the ladies from Wallace,—Mrs. Truscott and Miss Sanford especially. If I could have seen Truscott or foreseen the plan, it would have been easy to prevent it. As I could not do either, you must give him few opportunities of visiting them at our house. They will be in their own, though, by the time he comes."

They were not, however, as we have seen. The major had not contemplated the possibility of Gleason's taking a "ten days' delay" before reporting for duty, and so having ample time in which to ingratiate himself with the ladies. What he would have said in his own vigorous English could he have seen the lieutenant leaning over Miss Sanford's shoulder as she sat at the table once more looking through the cavalry album, will not bear recording in these pages. As Mrs. Stannard herself glanced in from the hall-way she more than wished that Luce were home if only to hear her lion growl. She thought anxiously of him and of the situation of affairs in the Indian country only a hundred miles to the north. She dreaded to tell Mrs. Truscott of the regiment's prospects for immediate ac-

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tion, but she determined to try some expedient to rid Miss Sanford and the house of the presence of Mr. Gleason. Her air was brisk and determined, therefore, as she entered the parlor.

"The major writes me from the Niobrara crossing that the regiment has had some sharp chasing to do already, and that they will be across the trails in two days, when they will certainly have fighting," she said, looking intently at Mr. Gleason. "What news do you get?"

"Well, my mail has all gone on to Wallace, you see, Mrs. Stannard," explained he, unwilling to admit in the presence of the ladies that nobody in the regiment cared enough for him to write. "It will all be up to-morrow or next day, I presume, and by that time the troops will be here, and I'll be myself again. The real cavalryman, Miss Sanford, is like a fish out of water if separated more than a day from his horse. I long to be in saddle again," he added, with a complacent glance at the tall, well-proportioned figure reflected in the mirror. Gleason prided himself, and not without reason, on his manly build, and was incessantly finding some means of calling attention to it.

"If the major's views are correct, you will have abundant cavalry duty this summer, Mr. Gleason," said Mrs. Stannard, "and I was about to ask you if you heard nothing at the office,—if none of the garrison officers had letters or news from the front." She hoped he would offer to go and inquire in person, as he had gone for the mail; but Gleason preferred to have the officers suppose that he was in full possession of news which would not be sent to them. Going for the ladies' let-

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ters implied certain authority from them,—certain intimacy in the household. Going to inquire for news, on the contrary, implied lack of information, and it was his rôle to play that the —th kept him fully "posted." His reply was therefore brief, and he quickly changed the subject.

"There was no news that I heard of, Mrs. Stannard, but I will go and see Colonel Whaling after he has had time to read all his mail. Miss Sanford was just asking me something about Mr. Stryker,—she was admiring his photograph."

"Bring the album out on the piazza. It is lovely and bright there now, and the wind is not blowing, for a wonder. I think we will all be better for fresh air, and Mrs. Truscott will be down in a moment." Mrs. Stannard spoke decidedly, and he had no course but to obey, even though he did not see the grateful look in Miss Sanford's eyes. He much preferred the confidential flavor which was possessed by a parlor interview, but there was no help for it. Following the lead of his hostess, he stepped out upon the piazza just as Mrs. Truscott, bright, animated, and happy, came fluttering down the stairs waving the captain's letter. Miss Sanford glanced up at her bonny face, and smiled sympathetically.

"No need to ask you is all well, Gracie."

"No, indeed! Jack writes that they will be in camp close beside us to-morrow morning. Oh, listen! There's the band, and that is the very quickstep he used to love so much at the Point." And, fairly dancing in her happiness, she threw her arm around Marion's waist and together they appeared at the threshold,—a lovely

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picture, as the cap-doffing group of officers thought to a man. Half a dozen of these gentry were lolling at the gate; the broad walk was already alive with graceful forms in summer dresses, with playful children and sedate nurse-maids trundling the inevitable baby-carriage. The band had just taken possession of its circular stand out on the parade; a few carriages and buggies had driven out from town. It was a lovely June Saturday afternoon,—the hebdomadal half holiday of the military bailiwick,—and the dingy brown frontier fort looked merry as sunshine, music, and sweet faces could make it. Seeing the ladies upon the piazza, there was a general movement among the officers on the walk indicative of a desire to join the party, and Mr. Gleason gritted his teeth and went for more chairs. Mrs. Turner had appeared on her own gallery just before, possibly with the intention of starting a rival levee, and one or two youthful moths were fluttering about her candle already. She was not averse to a flirtation, ordinarily, but it did not look well to see her sitting with only one or two of the infantry subalterns when Mrs. Stannard's piazza was filled. She wisely determined to join the majority; smilingly transferred herself and escort thither, and was as smilingly welcomed. There must have been a dozen in the group—officers and ladies—when the commanding officer's orderly entered the gate, saluted Mr. Gleason, and said,—

"Colonel Whaling's compliments, sir, and could you tell him when Lieutenant Ray will be here?"

The ladies looked up in surprise. The officers—all of whom remembered the name in connection with what had been said by Messrs. Crane, Wilkins, and Gleason

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himself—listened for his reply. Gleason was quick to note the silence and to divine its cause.

"Give my compliments to the colonel, and say that I do not know. I have not seen or heard—rather, I have not seen Mr. Ray since leaving Kansas City," he replied.

For a moment no one spoke. Then, as the orderly walked away, Mrs. Stannard, coloring slightly, turned full upon the lieutenant. "Mr. Gleason, it seems strange that you should know nothing of Mr. Ray's movements. You are generally well informed, and the major writes me how pleasantly they are looking forward to Ray's coming. You know that out in the regiment they expect him by 'pony express,'" she laughingly said, for the benefit of her silent auditors.

Gleason well divined her object. It was to convey to the garrison officers that Ray was popular among his comrades at the front, however he might be regarded by those at the rear. He had already committed himself in presence of several of those now in the party, and he answered,—

"I'm afraid some people will be disappointed, then. To begin with, there is no way of his reaching the regiment until Truscott and Webb go up with their companies. He could get no farther than Laramie by stage even were he here to try; but he isn't here,—and he isn't likely to be, either."

"Will you tell me why?" asked Mrs. Stannard, paling now, but looking fixedly at him with a gleam in her blue eyes that made him wince.

"Well, I'd rather not go into particulars," he muttered, looking uneasily around.

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"Is it illness, Mr. Gleason?"

"No; I don't know that it is."

"Then, for one, I feel confident that he will be here in abundant time to go by first opportunity," she said, with quiet meaning.

"Who may this swell be?" languidly remarked one of the officers, looking down the road towards the gate. All eyes followed his in an instant.

Speeding at easy lope upon a spirited sorrel a horseman came jauntily up the row. The erect carriage, the perfect seat, the ease and grace with which his lithe form swayed with every motion of his steed, all present could see at a glance. Mrs. Stannard rose quickly to her feet; her gaze becoming eager, then joyous.

"Look!" she almost cried. "It's Mr. Ray himself!"

In another minute, throwing himself lightly from the saddle, and tossing the reins to a statuesque orderly, the horseman came beaming through the gate, and Mrs. Stannard, to Miss Sanford's mingled amaze and approbation, was warmly grasping both his hands in hers. Mrs. Truscott, blushing brightly and showing welcome and pleasure in her lovely eyes, but with the reserve of younger wifehood, had held forth one little hand. Then she heard the voluble gush with which Mrs. Turner precipitated herself upon him, and, while he remained captive—as he had to—in that fair matron's hands, laughingly answering her thronging questions, Marion Sanford had her first look at the young officer who had been the subject of such varying report. First impressions are ever strong, and what she saw was this: a lithe, deep-chested, square-shouldered young fellow, with nerve and spring in every motion, standing bare-

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headed before them with the sunlight dancing on his close-cropped hair and shapely head. His eyes were dark, and heavily shaded with thick brows and long curling lashes, but the eyes brightened with every laughing word,—were full of life and health and straightforwardness and fun. She could not but note how clear and brave and wide-open they were, despite the little wrinkles gathered at the corners and a faint shading underneath. His forehead, what could be seen of it when he tossed aside the dark, wavy "bang" that fell almost as low as her own, was white and smooth, but temples, cheeks, the smooth-shaven jaws, and the round, powerful throat were bronzed and tanned by sun and wind, and his white teeth gleamed all the whiter through the shading of the thick, curling, dark moustache, and the lips that laughed so merrily were soft and pink as any woman's might be; at least they were when he bowed and smiled and spoke her name when introduced to her, and when he nodded companionably to the bowing group of officers, to whom Mrs. Stannard presented him with marked pride, "Mr. Ray—of Ours," but how, for a second, his eye flashed and how rigid a spasm crossed his lips when Gleason's name was mentioned. To him he merely nodded, and instantly turned his back. All this and more Miss Sanford noted by that electric process which was known to women long before lightning was photographed, and enabled the sex to see in a quarter-second intricate details of feminine costume that it would take the nimblest tongue ten minutes to describe. She noticed his dress, so unlike the precise attire of his comrades, who wore, to the uttermost detail, the regulation uniform. He had tossed a broad-

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brimmed, light-colored scouting hat upon the little grass plat as he entered, and now stood before them in the field rig he so well adorned. A dark-blue, double-breasted, broad-collared flannel shirt, tucked in at the waist in snugly-fitting breeches of Indian-tanned buck-skin, while Sioux leggings encased his legs from knee to ankle, and his feet were shod substantially in alligator-skin. Mexican spurs were at his heels; a broad leather belt bristling with cartridges, and supporting knife and revolver, hung at his waist; a red silk handkerchief was loosely knotted at his throat, and soft brown gauntlets covered his hands until they were discarded as he greeted them. If ever man looked the picture of elastic health and vigor it was Mr. Ray. This, then, was something like the cavalry life of which she had heard so much. Marion Sanford, despite Eastern education and refinement, was so unconventional as to find something more attractive in Mr. Ray in this same field rig than in Mr. Gleason in faultlessly accurate uniform.

"Why, Mr. Ray, how very well you look!" was Mrs. Turner's exclamation, "and somebody said you had been ill."

"I? No indeed! I never felt better in my life."

"But where have you been? When did you come? Why didn't you write?" were some among the countless questions thrust upon him.

"I had a few days' delay, you know; came by way of Omaha to see my sister; just arrived at one to-day; left my trunks with the quartermaster at the depot; got into field rig in fifteen minutes; packed my saddle-bags and slung them on Dandy, who has been waiting

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for me ever since the regiment marched; galloped out here to say good-by to you, and in half an hour I'll be off for Laramie."

"Why, *Mr.* Ray! What can be the hurry? Why start this evening?"

"Why not?" he laughed. "Dandy and I can reach the Chug and put up with old Phillipse to-night, and gallop on to Laramie to-morrow. Once there, it won't take me long to find my way out to the regiment."

"Why, the whole country is full of Indians!" expostulated Mrs. Stannard. "The major writes in this very letter that no one ventures north of the Platte."

"How did the letter come in, then? and how is communication kept up?" asked the lieutenant, showing his white teeth in his amusement.

"Oh! couriers, of course; but they are half-breeds, and have lived all their life in that country."

"Well, I can wriggle through if they can. One thing is certain, it won't be for lack of trying. So, whatever you may have to send to the major, get ready; the lightning express leaves at 4.30. I must go and report my movements to the commanding officer, and then will come back to you. Is the adjutant here?" he asked, looking around at the party of infantrymen who were standing waiting for a chance to excuse themselves, and leave the ladies to the undisputed possession of their evident favorite. Mr. Warner bowed:

"At your service, Mr. Ray."

"Will you come and present me to the colonel? I will be back in ten minutes, Mrs. Stannard; and, Mrs. Truscott, remember it is over a year since I saw you last,—and you gave me good luck the last time I went

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out scouting." With that, and a general bow by way of parting courtesy, Mr. Ray took himself and the post adjutant off. For a moment there was silence. Everybody gazed after him except Gleason.

"Isn't that just too characteristic of Mr. Ray for anything?" exclaimed Mrs. Turner. "I wonder if any other officer would be in such a hurry to risk his scalp in chasing the regiment? *You* wouldn't, would you, Mr. Gleason?" she added, with the deliberate and mischievous impertinence she knew would sting, and meant should sting, and felt serenely confident that her victim could not resent. He flushed hotly:

"My duties are with my troop, Mrs. Turner, and Mr. Ray's with his. When my troop goes I go with it. When his went—he didn't. That's all there is to it."

"But he couldn't go, Mr. Gleason, as you well know," replied Mrs. Turner; and evidently Mrs. Stannard, too, was eager to ask him what he had to say *now* about Mr. Ray's staying behind. To tell the truth, he was more dismayed by Ray's appearance than he dare admit even to himself. He was startled. He had grave reason for not wanting to meet him again, and as the officers were scattering he seized a pretext, called to one of them that he wished to speak with him a moment, and hurried away. When Ray returned from the colonel's quarters, he had the field to himself, and that they might have him—their regimental possession—to themselves, Mrs. Stannard begged the younger ladies to usher him into the parlor, where they could be secure against interruption until he had to start.

Gleason's business with his infantry friend was of

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slight moment, apparently, as he speedily left him and wended his way to the quarters of the commanding officer. Old Colonel Whaling was just coming forth, and they met at the gate.

"You sent me an inquiry a few moments ago, sir, which I could not answer at the time," said the lieutenant, in his blandest manner. "I see that Mr. Ray has arrived to speak for himself. May I ask if he was wanted for anything especial?" And Gleason looked very closely into the grizzled features of the commandant.

"Some letters for him had been sent with my mail—and a telegram. I inferred that he must be coming, and thought you might know. Rather a spirited young fellow he seems to be. I was quite startled at his notion of riding alone in search of the regiment. How soon does he start? I see his horse there yet."

"He spoke of going in a few moments, sir. You see we have been so much accustomed to this sort of thing in Arizona that there is nothing unusual in it to us. Still, I hardly expected Mr. Ray would be going—or rather—there were some matters which he left unsettled that I supposed would prevent his going. You didn't happen to notice where his letters were from, I suppose?" asked the lieutenant, tentatively.

The colonel would have colored had he been younger, but his grizzled old face had long since lost its capacity for blushing. He felt that it grew hot, however, and Gleason's insinuation cut, as Gleason knew it would. Old Whaling was morbidly inquisitive as to the correspondence of his officers, and could rarely resist the temptation of studying postmarks, seals, superscrip-

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tion, and general features of all letters that came through his hands.

"Not—not especially," he stammered.

Gleason saw his advantage and pursued it. He spoke with all apparent hesitancy and proper regret.

"I feared that he might have been recalled, or his going arrested by orders from division headquarters, or from Fort Leavenworth. Some things with regard to the purchase of one lot of horses, of which I disapproved, were being looked into when I came away, and when—— Well, colonel, it is against the rule of our regiment to talk to outsiders of one another" ("Like—ahem!" was old Whaling's muttered comment as he recalled what he had heard of Gleason's revelations at the store), "and I would not allude to this but that, as commanding officer, you will be sure to hear of it all. You see the principal dealer with whom we did business is a brother-in-law of Mr. Ray's,—a fellow named Rallston,—and some of his horses wouldn't pass muster anywhere; but—well, Ray was with him day after day, and kept aloof from Buxton and myself, and there was some money transaction between them, and there's been a row. At the last moment Rallston came to me to complain that he had been cheated, and what I'm afraid of is that Ray promised to secure the acceptance of a lot of worthless horses by the board for some five hundred dollars cash advanced him by Rallston. He was hot about it, and swore he would bring matters to General Sheridan's notice instantly. That is what made me so guarded in the reply I sent you. I owe you this explanation, colonel, but trust you will consider it confidential."

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Whaling looked greatly discomposed but unquestionably interested. He eyed Gleason sharply and took it all in without a word.

"I thought some of his letters might have been from Leavenworth," said Gleason, after a pause.

"One of them was,—that is, I think I saw the office mark,—but nothing official has reached me on the matter. I'm sorry to hear it, very; for both your colonel and Major Stannard spoke in highest terms of Mr. Ray when they were here."

"Oh, Ray has done good service and all that sort of thing, but when a fellow of his age gets going downhill with debts and drinking and cards—well, you know how it has been in your own regiment, colonel."

"He don't look like a drinking man," said the colonel. "I never saw clearer eyes or complexion in any fellow."

"Ye-es; he looks unusually well just now."

And just at that moment as they stood there talking of him, Mrs. Stannard's door opened and he came forth, the three ladies following. He did look well,—more than well, as he turned with extended hand to say good-by. "Dandy," his lithe-limbed sorrel, pricked up his dainty, pointed ears and whinnied eagerly as he heard his step on the piazza, giving himself a shake that threatened the dislocation of his burden of blankets, canteen, and saddle-bags. The ladies surrounded him at the gate. Mrs. Stannard's kind blue eyes were moistening. How often had she said good-by to the young fellows starting out as buoyantly as Ray to-day, thinking as she did so of the mothers and sisters at home! How often had it happened that they came

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back maimed, pallid, suffering, or—not at all! She had always liked Ray, he was so frank, so loyal, so true, and more than ever she liked now to show her friendship and regard since he had been slandered. Mrs. Truscott and Miss Sanford stood with arms entwined about each other's waist,—the sweetest and best of them have that innate, inevitable coquetry,—and Mrs. Stannard bent forward to rearrange the silken knot at his throat, giving it an approving pat as she surveyed the improvement. Ray smiled his thanks.

"Do you remember the night at Sandy, Mrs. Truscott, the last scout we started out on, and how you came to see us off and wish me good luck?"

"As well as though it were only yesterday," she answered.

"We *had* good luck. It was one of the best scouts ever made from Sandy, and the Apaches caught it heavily. It was a success all through except our—our losing Tanner and Kerrigan. Jack's hit was to be envied."

She shuddered and drew closer to Miss Sanford's side.

"Oh, Mr. Ray! I cannot bear to think of that fight. I won't wish you good luck again. You always expect it to mean unlimited meetings with the Indians. I pray you may not see one."

"Then I appeal to you, Miss Sanford. Shall I confess that your name is one I have envied for the last five years? No, don't be amazed! We Kentuckians always associate it now with two of our grandest horses,—Monarchist and Harry Bassett. Why, I'm going to ride the old Sanford colors myself this sum-

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mer. See,—the dark blue?" he laughed, pointing to his breast.

"Then you should be among the first coming home," she answered, brightly, "and that isn't your custom, I'm told."

"But in this case the whole regiment will be wearing the dark blue; so there will be no distinction. I won't beg for a ribbon. It's bad luck. I stole the tassel of Miss Pelham's fan in Arizona and wore it on the next dash; we never saw an Indian, and she married a fellow who stayed at home. All the same, Miss Sanford, if you hear of the —th doing anything especially lively this summer, remember that one fellow in the crowd rides his best to win for the sake of your colors. *Au revoir.* Come, Dandy, you scamp; now for a scamper to the Chug."

He sprang lightly into saddle, waved his hat to them, then bent low, as by sudden impulse, and held out his hand.

"God bless you, Mrs. Stannard!" he said; and looking at her in half surprise, they saw her eyes were brimming with tears.

Another moment and he had turned Dandy's head to the west, and was tripping up the road past the adjutant's office. They saw him raise his gauntleted hand in salute to the post commander, and heard his voice call out, ringingly, "Good-day, colonel." They saw that between him and Mr. Gleason no sign of recognition passed, and they stood in silence watching him until, turning out at the west gate, he struck a lope and disappeared behind the band quarters, out on the open prairie.

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When Mr. Gleason touched his cap to the colonel and started to rejoin the ladies, they saw him coming. Nobody said a word, but the three ladies re-entered the house, Mrs. Truscott last; but it was Mrs. Stannard who turned back in the hall and shut the door. When Gleason reached the front gate he concluded not to enter, but went on down the row.

CHAPTER X.

A JUNE SUNDAY.

It is a cloudless Sunday morning, the longest Sunday in that month of longest days, warm, balmy, rose-bearing June. Only a few hours' high is the blazing god of day, but his beams beat fiercely down on a landscape wellnigh as arid as the Arizona our troopers knew so well. Not a breath of air is stirring. Down in the shallow valley to the right, where the cottonwoods are blistering beside the sandy stream-bed, a faint column of smoke rises straight as the stem of a pine-tree until it melts into indistinguishable air. The sandy waste goes twisting and turning in its fringe of timber southeastward along a broad depression in the face of the land, until twenty odd miles away it seems brought up standing by a barrier of rugged hills that dip into the bare surface at the south, and go rising and falling, rolling and tumbling, higher and raggeder, to the north. All the intervening stretches are bare,

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tawny, sun-scorched, except those fringing cottonwoods. All those tumbling heights are dark and frowning through their beards of gloomy larch and pine. Black they stand against the eastern sky, from the jagged summits at the south to where the northernmost peak,—the Inyan Kara,—the Heengha-Kaaga of the Sioux, stands sentinel over the sisterhood slumbering at her feet. These are the Black Hills of Dakota, as we see them from the breaks of the Mini Pusa, a long day's march to the west. Here to our right, southeastward, rolls the powdery flood of the South Cheyenne, when earlier in the season the melting snows go trickling down the hill-sides. But to-day only in dry and waving ripples of sand can we trace its course. If you would see the water, dig beneath the surface. Here behind us rolls another sandy stream, dry as its Dakota name implies,—Mini Pusa: Dry Water,—and to our right and rear is their sandy confluence. Southward, almost to the very horizon, in waves and rolls and ridges, bare of trees, void of color, the earth unfolds before the eye, while, as though to relieve the strain of gazing over the expanse so illimitable in its monotony, a blue line of cliffs and crags stretches across the sky line for many degrees. Beyond that, out of sight to the southeast, lies the sheltered, fertile valley of the upper White Earth River; and there are the legal homes of thousands of the "nation's wards," the bands of the Dakotas—Ogallalla and Brulé, led by Red Cloud and Spotted Tail. There, too, are clothed and fed and cared for a thousand odd Cheyennes. Just over that ridge at its western end, where it seems to blend into the general surface of upland prairie, a faint blue peak

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leaps up into the heated air,—"Old Rawhide,"—the landmark of the region. Farther off, southwestward, still another peak rises blue and pale against the burning distance. 'Tis far across the Platte, a good hundred miles away. Plainsmen to this day call it Larmie in that iconoclastic slaughter of every poetic title that is their proud characteristic. All over our grand continent it is the same. The names, musical, sonorous, or descriptive, handed down as the heritage of the French missionaries, the Spanish explorers, or the aboriginal owners, are all giving way to that democratic intolerance of foreign title which is the birthright of the free-born American. What name more grandly descriptive could discoverer have given to the rounded, gloomy crest in the southern sierras, bald at the crown, fringed with its circling pines,—what better name than Monte San Matéo—Saint Matthew,—he of the shaven poll?

Over a century the title held. Adaptive Indian, Catholic Mexican, acceptive dragoon, one and all respected and believed in it. But then came the miner and the cowboy, and with them the new vocabulary. Monte San Matéo slinks in unmerited shame to hide its heralded deformity as Baldhead Butte. What devilish inspiration impelled the Forty-Niners to damn Monte San Pablo to go down to eternity as Bill Williams' Mountain? Who but an iconoclast would rend the sensitive ear with such barbarities as the *Loss Angglees* of to-day for the deep-vowelled Los Angeles of the last century? Who but a Yankee would swap the murky "Purgatoire" for Picketwire, and make Zumbro River of the Rivière des Ombres of brave old Père

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Marquette? And so, too, it goes through all the broad Northwest. Indian names, beautiful in themselves even though at times untranslatable, are tossed contemptuously aside to be replaced by the homeliest of every-day appellations, until the modern geography of Wyoming, Dakota, Montana, and Idaho bristles with innumerable Sage, Boxelder, Horse, and Pine Creeks.

Mini Pusa—Dry Water—have the Dakotas called for ages the sandy stream that twists and turns and glares in the hot sunshine down here in the vale behind us. "Muggins's Fork," some stockman said he heard it called a month ago. Far over there to the east—almost under the black shadow of the hills—we see another slender thread of questionable green; cottonwoods again, no doubt, for nothing but cottonwoods or sage-brush or grease-wood—worse yet—will grow down in the alkaline wastes of this Wyoming valley; and that thread or fringe betokens the existence of a stream in the spring-time,—one that the Sioux have ever called the Beaver, after the amphibious rodent who dammed its waters, and thereby rescued them from a like fate at the hands of modern residents. Far to the southeast, miles and miles away, dim and hazy through the heat-waves of the atmosphere one can almost see another twisting string of shade, the cottonwoods on the banks of the winding War Bonnet; at least so the Sioux named it, after their gorgeous crown of eagle feathers, but 'twas too polysyllabic, too poetic for the blunt-spoken frontiersman, who long since compromised on Hat Creek. We are in the heart of the Indian country, but the wild romance has fled. We are on dangerous ground, for there, straight away before our eyes, broad, beaten as a

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race-course, prominent as any public highway, descending the slope until lost in the timber of the South Cheyenne, then reappearing beyond, until far in the southeast it dwindles in perspective to a mere thread, and so dips into the valley of the War Bonnet and Indian Creek,—there lies the broad road from the reservations to the war-path. It is the trail over which for years the "Wards of the Nation" have borne the paid-up prices of their good behavior to sustain their brethren renegados in the Powder River Country far up here to the northwest. Over this road all winter long, all the spring-tide, and to this very week in June, arms, ammunition, ponies, bacon, flour, coffee, sugar, clothing, and warriors have been speeding to the hosts of Sitting Bull. The United States is sending to-day three or four thousand men at arms, equipped and supplied by the Department of War, to try conclusions with about twice that number of trained warriors similarly provided for by the Department of the Interior. It is odd, but it is a fact. Camping along the banks of the Rawhide, the first stream on the Indian side of the Platte, the officer in command of the advance-guard of the —th was surprised to see a train of wagons and without apparent escort. Galloping down to their fires, he accosted the wagon-master, who smilingly assured him that he and his train were in no danger from the Indians,—they were bringing them supplies. What supplies? Why, metallic cartridges, of course, Winchester and Henry, for their magazine-rifles, don't you know? Oh, yes. He understood well enough that they were all going out on the war-path, but he couldn't help *that*. He was paid so much a month to haul supplies from Sid-

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ney to Red Cloud agency, and if it happened to be powder and lead, 'tweren't none o' his business. How much had he? Oh, three or four hundred thousand rounds, he reckoned. To whom consigned? Why, the trader,—the Indian store at Red Cloud, of course,—Mr. ——'s. In speechless indignation the officer rides off and reports the matter to the colonel, and the colonel goes down and interviews the imperturbable "boss" with similar result, and more; for he comes back with a shrug of the shoulders and some honest blasphemy, for which may Heaven forgive him. (The fine inflicted by army regulations has not yet been collected.) "We can do nothing," he says. "That fellow has his papers straight from the Interior Department. He has been hauling cartridges all spring." And now, here is the advance-guard of the —th again far up on the Mini Pusa, just arrived, and that slender column of smoke rising from among the cottonwoods tells of a tiny fire where the men are boiling their coffee, while, miles away to the southwest, the rising dust-clouds proclaim the coming of the regiment itself. Out on the distant heights, on either side, other smokes are rising. Indian signals, that say to lurking warriors far and near, "Be on your guard; soldiers coming;" and so, here on the breaks of the Mini Pusa on this scorching Sabbath morn, the vanguard of the —th has reached and tapped the broad highway of Indian commerce. The laws of the nation they are sworn to defend prohibit their interfering with the distribution of ammunition by that same nation to the foes they are ordered to meet. The nation is impartial: it provides friend and foe alike. The War Office sends its cartridges to the —th

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through the ordnance officer, Lieutenant X. The Indian Bureau looks after its wards through Mr. —— at Red Cloud. And now the —th is ordered to stop those cartridges from getting to Sitting Bull up on the Rosebud. That is what brings them here to the Mini Pusa, and we see them now riding down in long dusty column into the valley, heedless of the dust they make, for the Indians have hovered on their flanks, out of sight, out of range, but *seeing*, ever since they crossed the Platte; and here they are, "old Stannard" and Billings with the advance, lying prone on their stomachs and searching through their field-glasses for any signs of Indian coming from the reservations, while with the column itself, in their battered slouch hats and rough flannel and buckskin, bristling with cartridges and ugly beards, burned and blistered and parched with scorching sun and winds tempered only with alkali dust, ride our Arizona friends,—many of them at least. Old Bucketts with his green goggles; Turner with his melancholy face and placid ways; Raymond, stern and swart; Canker, querulous and "nagging" with his men, but eager for any service; Stafford, who won his troop *vice* the noble-hearted Tanner whom we lost among the Apaches; Wayne, who is loquacity itself whenever he can find a listener, and who talks his patient subaltern almost deaf through the long day marches; and Crane and Wilkins, who are a good deal together at every halt, and consort more with Canker than other captains; and then there is the jolly element that ever clusters around Blake, whose spirits defy adversity, and whose merry quips and jests and boundless distortions of fact or fancy are the joy of the regiment.

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With Blake one always finds Merrill and Freeman and some of the jovial junior captains, and, of course, the boys,—Hunter, Dana, Briggs; and here they are on this blessed Sabbath of the Centennial June, sent up to stop Mr. ——'s cartridges, *after* they have become the property of "Mr. Lo;" and once a cartridge becomes Indian property, there is only one way of stopping it. The wealth of France is inadequate to purchase of Alfred Krupp a single gun from his shops at Essen, because his love for Fatherland will not let him place a power in the hands of the hereditary enemy. It takes enlightened England and free America to supply friends and foes alike with the means to kill.

Stannard closes his glass with a grunt of dissatisfaction, and turns to Billings. "None of those cartridges get through here *this* day anyhow; but how many do you suppose Mr. —— has sent up there already?" And he points as he speaks to the far northwest.

Under that blue dome, cloudless, glaring; under the sentinel peaks of the Big Horn shimmering there in the distance, over the rolling divide in that glorious upland that heaves and rolls and tosses between the Rosebud and the swirling stream in the broad valley farther west, another regiment—that of which we spoke, whose leader is famed in song and story—is riding rapidly this still Sunday morning in search of Mr. ——'s cartridges. Some say the tall, blue-eyed, blond-bearded captain who leads that beautiful troop of bays is Mr. ——'s brother. Odd! yet how can the Indian Bureau know that Crazy Horse and Two Bears and Kicking Mule want to buy Mr. ——'s bullets to kill his brother with? How, indeed, should Mr. ——

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know? Army officers, 'tis true, have warned them time and again; but when were army officers' statements ever potent in the Interior Department against the unendorsed assertion of Crazy Horse or Kicking Mule that he only wanted to kill buffalo? Indeed, is not Mr. —— himself eager to go bail for the purchaser, since his profits are so high? Over the divide, hot on the broad, beaten trail goes the long column. How different are they from our sombre friends of the —th, who, miles and marches away to the southeast, are dismounting and unsaddling under the cottonwoods! Years in Arizona have robbed the latter of all the old love for the pomp and panoply of war. There is not a bit of finery in the command, there is hardly a vestige of uniform; but look here, look here at the brilliance of the Seventh. Bright guidons flutter at the head of every troop; bright chevrons, stripes, and buttons gleam on the dress of many an officer and man; the steeds, though worn and jaded with an almost ceaseless trot of thirty-six hours, are spirited and beautiful; some are gayly decked. Foremost rides their tried leader, clad from head to foot in beaded buckskin. "The Long Hair" the Sioux still call him, though now the long hair waves not on the breeze, and an auburn beard conceals the handsome outline of the face all troopers know so well. Near him rides his adjutant, dressed like himself in their favorite buckskin, so too are others among the officers, though many wear the jaunty fatigue uniform of the cavalry, and the rank and file are all, or nearly all, in blue. But a short way back they have come upon the scaffolding sepulchre of Indian warriors lately slain in

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battle; but a few miles ahead they see a broad valley from which, far from south to north, a vast dust-cloud is rising, and for this there can be but one explanation, —thousands of Indian ponies in excited motion. Ay, scouts in advance already sight indications of the near presence of a great Indian community, and the column resolves itself into three, trotting in parallel lines across the treeless upland a mile or so apart. With the northernmost, the largest, rides now the leader of all, while between them gallop couriers carrying rapid orders. Every face sets eagerly westward. Every heart beats high with the thrill of coming battle. Some there are who note the immensity of the dust-cloud, who reason silently that for miles and miles the valley before them is covered by the scurrying herds; ten thousand ponies at least must there be to stir up such a volume; then, how many warriors are there to meet these seven hundred? No matter what one thinks, not a man falters.

Far to the south the snow peaks glisten over the pine-crested range of the Big Horn. Nearer at hand deep, dark cañons burrow in towards the bowels of the mountains. Then from their bases leap the rolling foot-hills, brown and bare but for the dense growth of the sun-cured buffalo-grass. Westward, open and undulating sweeps the broad expanse of almost level valley beyond the bluffs, close under which is curling the fatal stream,—the "Greasy Grass" of the Dakotas. Far to the north in the same endless waves the prairie rolls to the horizon, beyond which lies the shallow river where the transports are toiling up-stream with comrade soldiery. Behind the column, eastward, dip the sheltered valleys of the Rosebud and the breaks of the

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Tongue among the Cheetish Mountains; and there, not fifty miles away as the crow flies, the soldiers of the Gray Fox, over two thousand strong, are camped, awaiting reinforcements before renewing the attempt to advance upon these lurking bands of Sitting Bull. Not two days' march away, on both flanks, are four times his numbers in friends and allies; not two miles away, in his front, are ten times his force in foemen, savage, but skilled; yet all alone and unsupported, the Long Hair rides dauntlessly to the attack, even though he and his well know it must be battle to the death, for Indian warfare knows no mercy.

There be those who say the assault was rash; the speed unauthorized; the whole effort mad as Lucan's launch of the Light Brigade at Balaclava; but once there in view of the fatal valley, the sight is one to fire the brain of any trooper. Galloping to a little mound to the right front, the broad expanse lies before the leader's eyes, and far as he can see, out to the west and northwest, the dust-cloud rises heavily over the prairie; here and there, nearer at hand, are the scurrying ponies and, close down by the stream, excited bands of Indians tearing down lodge after lodge and preparing for rapid flight. But one conclusion can he draw. They are panic-stricken, stampeded. They are "on the run" already, and unless attacked at once can never be overhauled. They will scatter over the face of the wild Northwest in an hour's time. He cannot see what we know so well to-day: that only the northern limits of the great villages are open to his gaze; that the sheltering bluffs hide from him all the crowded lodges of the bands farthest to the south, and that while squaws and

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children are indeed being hurried off to the west, hundreds, thousands of exultant young warriors are galloping in from the western prairies, herding the war-ponies before them. He cannot see the scores that, rifle in hand, are rushing into the willows and cottonwoods along the stream, eager and ready to welcome his coming; he sends hurried orders to the leaders of the little columns on his left: "Push ahead; cross the stream; gallop northward when you reach the western bank, and attack that end of the village while I strike from the east." He never dreams that behind that solid curtain of bluff Ogallalla, Sans Arc, Uncapapa, and Blackfoot lurk in myriads. "The biggest Indian village on the continent!" they say, he shouts to the nearest column; but only the northern limits of it could he see. Far, far away in the East the church-bells are ringing out their glad welcome to the God-given day of rest. Mothers, sisters, wives, lift up a prayer for the loved ones on the savage frontier. Aloft the sun in cloudless splendor looks down on all. Westward press the comrade columns, until, reaching the head of a shallow ravine that leads northwestward towards the stream, the Long Hair spurs to the front,—Oh, those beautiful Kentucky sorrels! Oh, those gallant, loyal hearts! —and the eager, bearded faces, the erect, athletic forms, the fluttering guidons, one by one are lost to view as they wind away down the coulée; one by one they disappear from sight, from hearing, of the comrades now trotting down the bluffs to the west. Take the last look upon them, fellows,—five fated companies. Obedient to their leader's order, loyal, steadfast, unmurmuring to the bitter end, they vanish once and for all from

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loving eyes. Only as gashed, lifeless, mutilated forms will we ever see them again.

Who has not read the story of the Little Horn? Why repeat it here? Who that was there will ever forget the sight that burst upon the astonished eyes of Reno's men when, breaking through the willows along the stream and reaching the level bench, they saw, not five miles away to the north, as was the first idea, but here in their very front, only long rifle-shot away, the southern outskirts of the great Indian metropolis that stretched away for miles to the north. God of battles! was this a position, was this a force to be assailed by one regiment? Why linger over it?—the half-hearted advance of the dismounted skirmish line; the hesitating rally; then the volley from the willows; the flanking warriors on the west; the sudden consciousness of their pitiful numbers as against the hordes now swarming upon them; the mad rush for the bluffs, with the yelling Indians dragging the rearmost from their steeds and butchering them as they rode; the Henrys and Winchesters pumping their bullets into the fleeing mass; the plunge into the seething waters; the panting scramble up the steep and slippery banks; the breathless halt at the crest, and then, then the backward glance at the field and the fallen. Who will forget McIntosh, striving to rally the rearmost, dragged from the saddle and hacked to death upon the sward? Who will forget Benny Hodgson's brave young face,—the pet, the pride of the whole regiment? Even the daring and devotion of his men could not save him from the hissing lead of those savage marksmen. Then the strained suspense, the half-hour's listening to the fierce,

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the awful volleying to the north that told of a fearful struggle. The flutter of hope that it might be the stronger battalion fighting its way through to the relief of theirs, the weak one; the blank faces that gazed one into another with awe-stricken inquiry as trumpet blare and rallying shout and rattling volley receded, not approached; died away, not thundered anew in coming triumph; the pall of certainty that fell on every man when silence so soon reigned in the distance, and pandemonium broke out afresh around them. Back from their bloody work, drunk with blood and victory, came by thousands the savage warriors to swell the forces that had driven the white soldiers to cover. Up, thank God! not an instant too soon, came the comrades from the distant left, and Benteen and MacDougall riding in with four full companies and the needed ammunition gave them strength to hold out. Through the hours of fierce battle that followed, through that dread "running the gauntlet" for water that the wounded craved, through the stern suspense and strain of the day and night that intervened before the rescuing forces of Terry came cautiously up the valley, and the Sioux melted away before them, ah! how many a time was the question asked, "What can have become of Custer?"

Far, far to the east this still Sabbath afternoon, seeking shelter from the glare of the same blazing sun, seeking sympathy from each other's words, seeking hope and comfort from Him who alone can aid, a little group of women gather at the frontier fort on the banks of the Missouri. They are the wives of the officers who that morning ride "into the Valley of Death" with their soldier leader. Fair young matrons and mothers,

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whose thoughts have little room for the glad jubilee in the still more distant East, whose world is with that charging column. Only a few days since there came to them the evil news that the Indians had forced back the soldiers of the southern Department,—that meant harder work, fiercer fighting for their own. And this dread anxiety it is that clusters them here, lifting up sweet voices in their hymn of praise to the Heavenly Throne, pleading, pleading for the life and safety of those who are their all in all. Oh, God! there is prophecy in the very words of their mournful song, though they know it not. Pitying Father, listen, and be merciful.

> "E'en though it be a Cross
> That raiseth me."

Vain the trembling hope, vain the tearful pleading. Far out on the slopes of the Little Horn those for whom these prayers are lifted have fought their last battle. God has, indeed, asked of these women that henceforth "they walk on in the shadow and alone."

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CHAPTER XI.

THE WOLF AND THE SHEEPFOLD.

THE glorious Fourth has come and gone. The Centennial anniversary has had its completed category of parade and picnic; speech and song; fun and fireworks. The thronging cities of the East have rejoiced with unusual enthusiasm, especially Philadelphia, whose coffers are plethoric with the tribute of visiting thousands. Out on the frontier we have celebrated with modified *éclat*, since the national celebrants are mostly absent on active service, and have no blank cartridges to dispose of. The big garrison flags have been duly hoisted and saluted. The troops have been paraded where there were any to parade, as only a few infantrymen remain to take care of the forts and the families. The Declaration of Independence has been read in one or two of the bigger posts, where enough remains of defenders to make up a fair-sized demonstration. One of these is far up on the Missouri, where the cavalry ladies are all invited to hear the infantry orator of the day—and go. No news has come for some time from husbands and lovers on the war-path, and it is best to be hopeful and cheery. They make a lovely picture, a dozen of them in their dainty white dresses, their smiling faces, their fluttering fans and ribbons. They applaud each telling point with encouraging bravos and the clapping of pretty hands. How free from care,

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how joyous, how luxurious is army life! How gleeful is their silvery laughter! How beaming the smiles with which they reward the young gallant who comes among them for their congratulations! *Vanitas, vanitatum!* They are nearly all widowed, poor girls, but they don't know it—not yet. The steamer laden with the wounded and the fell tidings of disaster is but a few hours away. Before the breaking of another day there will be none to smile in all their number. Verily, "In the midst of life we are in death."

And Russell, too, has had its jubilee—on a more extensive scale, for here are Webb and Truscott with their fine troops of horse, the band, the infantry companies, and a brace of old howitzers, with which they make the welkin ring. No tidings of any account have come from the front. The Gray Fox is puzzled at the situation. The Indians are out there somewhere, as he finds every time a scout goes forth, but they appear to be engrossed in some big council over at the Greasy Grass. One thing is certain, he can get no word through to Terry on the Yellowstone, and he cannot afford another tussle with such force as they show when he *does* come out. The —th is still down near the Black Hills. Busy? Oh, yes. Busy is no word for it! They are scampering all over the south Cheyenne country after small bands of Indians, whose fleet ponies keep them just out of range of the carbines and just out of reach of the horses, who, grain-fed all winter, are now losing speed, strength, and bottom on the scant and wiry grass they find in the sandy valleys. Truscott and Webb are eager to go forward, but orders say wait. Mrs. Truscott is again almost in heaven. Jack

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has been with her nearly a fortnight. They are domiciled in their new quarters. Mrs. Stannard is their next-door neighbor; much of their furniture has come, and the army home is beginning to look lovely. Mrs. Whaling and Mrs. Turner can never see enough of it, or say enough.

Large numbers of recruits have been sent to the post to be drilled and forwarded to the cavalry at the front. They are having riding-school all hours of the day, and the cavalry officers are in saddle from morn till night teaching them. Mr. Gleason is assiduous in this duty. Whatever Captain Truscott has heard to the gentleman's discredit in the past, he admits to himself that it has prepared him for agreeable disappointment. No lieutenant could be more attentive or subordinate, more determined to please. Captain Truscott cannot but wish that Mr. Gleason were less attentive to Miss Sanford, but that young lady is evidently fully able to keep him at a very pleasant distance. It excites the captain's admiration to see how perfectly lady-like, how really gracious is her manner to the aspiring widower, and yet—how serenely unencouraging. No one understood this better than Mr. Gleason himself. Finding her deeper, less impressionable than he at first supposed, he simply changed his tactics. He avoided the store, he shunned conversations on dangerous topics, he cultivated the society of Colonel Whaling, and deeply impressed that veteran with the depth of his information on dogs, horses, and military affairs. He dexterously lost small sums to the post commander at pool and billiards; enough to keep the old gentleman in cigars—and good-humor. He became "serious" in his conversation with

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the colonel's amiable wife, whose exemplary habit it was to be always found seated at a little table behind a very big Bible when visitors called; though the garrison *did* say, as garrisons will, that occasionally they had to knock or ring half a dozen times before the summons could be heard; not because the good lady was so deeply plunged in religious meditation, but because the clatter of angry tongues made all demonstration from without simply inaudible.

The long-suffering and short-serving domestics who successively reigned in the Whaling kitchen and chambers were wont to say that it was nag and scold from morn till dewy eve,—sometimes later,—and that in the midst of wrathful tirade the lady of the house would only be brought to instant silence by the announcement of "some one at the door." A certain Miss Finnegan, who served a brief apprenticeship in the household, acquired lasting fame in the garrison for the mimetic power which enabled her to portray "Mrs. Gineral's" instantaneous change from a posture of fury to one of rapt devotion. She could look like Hecate Hibernicized, and in one comprehensive second drop into a chair, "smooth her wrinkled front" and side curls, shake out her rumpled draperies, and rise from an instant's searching of the Scriptures with features expressive of the very acme of Christian peace and benediction. "Mrs. General" was a pet-name the lady had won from a wifely and lovable trait that prompted her to aggrandize her placid lord above his deserts. Him she ever addressed (in public), and of him she ever spoke, as "the general," irrespective of the fact that the rank was one he never had or never

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would attain, even by brevet, for the Senate drew the line at the man who had been in the army through three wars and never heard a hostile bullet whistle. His regiment had not been required in the Florida business. He himself was put on other duty when they went to Mexico, and, finally, in the great war of the Rebellion, there was constant need of regulars to act as mustering and disbursing officers at the rear. Such had been old Whaling's career, and, so long as he himself was utterly unpretentious,—never claimed to have done any war service, and was content to drift along and draw his pay,—nobody would have said much in detraction had it not been for his wife's persistent pushing. He was merely second in command of his regiment, but the lady spoke of him as "the general" on all occasions, and alluded to his immediate superior, who had led corps and divisions in his day, as Colonel Starr. Others—of equal rank and with the brevets of major-generals—she similarly belittled. They were merely field-officers. She admitted the existence of no greater man than "the general," her husband, and whatever might be the sorrows of other parents with their children, or housewives with their servants, Mrs. Whaling pitied,—even condoled,—but could not sympathize. With uplifted eyes she would thank the Giver of all good that He had blessed her with sons so noble and distinguished, with daughters so lovely and so dutiful, with servants so singularly devoted. In the various garrisons in which the good lady had flourished, what mattered it that her boys were known to be graceless young scamps whom cudgelling could not benefit, or that her gentle daughters squab-

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bled like cats and flew to the neighbors to spread the tales of their wrongs and mamma's injustice? What mattered it that her paragons of servants left her one after another and swore they couldn't stay in a house where there was so much spying and fault-finding? There was no shaking Mrs. Whaling's Christian determination to run with patience the race thus set before her.

Gleason found in converse with her so much that reminded him of the mother he had lost, alas! so many years ago, and Mrs. Whaling welcomed him to the consolations of her sanctified spirit. Together they deplored the frivolity and vices of the younger officers (Ray came in for a good showing-up just there, no doubt), and together they projected the reformation of some of her favorites in the garrison. A wise man was Gleason. She and her meek and lowly husband could be useful—very useful in time of need. And did he abandon his devotions to Miss Sanford? No, indeed! but they were modified as became the subject. He called less frequently; he became less personal, less aggressive in his talk; he had naught but good, or silence, for his comrades, and charity for the world. He threw into his every look and word a deference and a respect that made his manner proof against criticism; and yet, one and all, they could not welcome him. Truscott, his captain, had never yet dropped the "Mr." before the surname of his subaltern,—that well-understood barrier to all army intimacy,—and Gleason, who stood among the very first on the lineal list of lieutenants, hated him for the restriction, but gave no sign.

It was necessary that some one of the cavalry officers

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should be placed in charge of the newly-arrived recruits, and this duty fell to Gleason's lot. It relieved him from service with his troop and made him independent of his captain. Webb and Truscott, if consulted, would have named a far better instructor among their lieutenants, but Colonel Whaling issued the order from post headquarters, and there was nothing for it but obey. Gleason lent his best efforts to the work, and he and his drill sergeants were ceaseless in their squad instruction. Several old cavalrymen had come among the dozens of green hands, so had a small squad transferred by War Department orders from West Point. Among these men were competent drill-masters, and among the drill-masters the most active and efficient was the Saxon soldier, Sergeant Wolf.

Mr. Gleason had invited the ladies to walk out on the prairie east of the post one lovely morning late in June, that they might see the skirmish drills of the two cavalry troops. Often as she had been a spectator before, Mrs. Truscott never tired of watching Jack and his men, and Miss Sanford was greatly interested at all times in the martial exercises, especially the mounted. Strolling homeward about ten o'clock, having been joined by one of the young infantry officers, Mr. Gleason suggested their stopping at the store and refreshing themselves with a lemonade. Miss Sanford would have declined with thanks, but silently waited for her hostess to speak; and Mrs. Truscott, who remembered how papa had sometimes called her into the club-room when she was a child, and who knew that the garrison ladies frequently accepted such invitations, hesitatingly assented. It must be confessed that Mrs. Truscott some-

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times acted before she thought, and this was one of the times. Truscott himself rarely, if ever, entered the club-room, and had never thought it necessary to say anything to his wife on the subject. The door stood invitingly open; the attendant was lolling thereat in his shirt-sleeves admiringly scanning the approaching group. As soon as he saw they were heading for the club-room instead of the gate, he slipped behind the bar and put on his coat. Miss Sanford hung back as Mr. Gleason threw open the portals, and called out encouragingly,—

"Come right in, ladies; there's no one here but the bar-keeper."

Mrs. Truscott stepped lightly over the threshold, and glanced with smiling curiosity around. The first thing that caught her eye was a placard hanging at the entrance of a little alcove-like space beyond the rusty old billiard-tables. Within were two or three green baize-covered card-tables and rude wooden chairs. On the placard, roughly stencilled, was the legend,—

"He who enters here leaves soap behind."

Mrs. Truscott's eyes expressed wonderment and mirth commingled.

"How utterly absurd! Who did that, Mr. Gleason?"

"That? Oh! That's some of Blake's work, I believe! Ah—are you not coming in, Miss Sanford?"

"Thanks, no, Mr. Gleason; I believe I'll wait here," was the reply, pleasant but decided.

"Why, Marion! Do come in!" cried Mrs. Truscott, hastening to the door.

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Miss Sanford's face was flushing slightly, but her voice was gentle as usual.

"I'll wait for you, Grace; but I do not care for a lemonade, and—would rather not go in."

"Indeed, I don't care for one either. I only said yes because I thought, perhaps, you would like it—or would care to see the club-room," Mrs. Truscott protested, as she hurriedly came forth. "We are just as much obliged to you, Mr. Gleason, but—not to-day." And with that they resumed their homeward stroll. Once through the gate Mr. Gleason slackened the pace, so as to detain his fair companion a moment.

"Why would you decline my invitation?" he asked, in a tone of what was intended to be tender reproach.

"I prefer not to visit—the club-room, as I believe it is called."

"You would soon get used to it if you were in the Army," he ventured awkwardly.

"But I am not in the Army," she began, self-restrainedly enough; then, as though she could not repress the words, "Nor would I be if, as you say, I had to get used to that."

She has a temper then, quoth Gleason to himself, ruefully noting that he had made a bad move. It gave him an opportunity of putting in what was generally considered a pretty effective piece of work, however,—one that had been often employed on somewhat similar occasions, and will be again.

"Ah, Miss Sanford, were there more women like you, there would be fewer places like that."

But to this she made no reply whatsoever. If anything, its effect was to quicken her pace.

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Arriving near their quarters, a small party of enlisted men, apparently recruits, were observed clustered about a wagon loaded with boxes. A spruce, handsome, blond-moustached young soldier stepped suddenly into view from behind the wagon, where he had been superintending the unloading of some of the goods. At sight of him Miss Sanford stopped short. Looking wonderingly at her, Mr. Gleason saw that her face had paled, and that she was gazing intently on the approaching soldier and on Mrs. Truscott, who, absorbed in laughing talk with her escort, had apparently not observed him. As he halted and saluted, Mr. Gleason could not but note that she started, then that she had flushed crimson. He glanced quickly from one to the other,—the pale girl by his side, the startled young matron in front, and the statuesque soldier, respectfully standing with his hand at the cap visor.

"Pardon, madame; the quartermaster sends me to unload these boxes at Captain Truscott's quarters, if madame will designate the room to which they shall be carried."

"The captain will be here in a moment," she replied, hurriedly, and moving into the gate as though eager to avoid the very presence of the soldier. "Oh! may I ask you in, gentlemen?" she added, glancing over her shoulder, and still evidently discomposed.

And Gleason followed.

The parlor was cool and pleasant after the hot sunshine without. Mrs. Truscott threw herself into a chair, then rose as hastily and went into the dining-room beyond. Miss Sanford's eyes followed her anx-

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iously as she stood at the sideboard pouring out a glass of water.

"That man—er—Wolf, who came with this batch of recruits, tells me he was first sergeant of Captain Truscott's troop at the Point," he said, tentatively.

"Yes. When did he get here, or how?"

"He came with recruits two nights ago; transferred from West Point with some other men on the captain's application, as I understand it. I presume he is to be assigned to our troop."

And here the clatter of hoofs outside announced the captain's return from drill, and Gleason soon took his leave, pondering over what he had seen. What was the secret of Mrs. Truscott's evident uneasiness, if not agitation? what of Miss Sanford's visible annoyance?

It was very late that night when Miss Sanford sought her room. There had been a drive to town during the afternoon, and a pleasant dance at the hop-room afterwards. Not once had she had an opportunity of speaking alone with Mrs. Truscott, nor was she quite certain of what she wished to say even had the opportunity occurred. For several days previous to their start from the Point, Sergeant Wolf, with others of the cavalry detachment, had been constantly at the house packing goods and furniture. Nothing could exceed the punctilious distance and respect with which he addressed the ladies whenever occasion required that he should speak to them at all; but Miss Sanford could not forget his mysterious conduct the night she discovered him at the front gate. Once she spoke with half-laughing hesitancy of the assiduity with which the sergeant devoted all his spare time to his captain's service, or to madame's,

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and Grace had looked so annoyed that she ceased further mention of him. She wanted to tell her of his being at the gate that night, and his going around under the library-window, but it proved a difficult thing, and she postponed it from day to day. Then came the sudden departure of the sergeant and his party for New York, where they were ordered to report at a recruiting rendezvous. Believing that they had seen the last of him she breathed freer, and decided to keep the story of his midnight visit to herself, at least for a time; and now here he was again, and his coming had evidently startled her friend. She wanted, above all things, to have a frank talk with Mrs. Truscott. This keeping a secret from her was distressing, and she could not bear the thought of a possible cloud or misunderstanding between them, but poor Grace had totally forgotten the existence of such a person as Wolf by the time they got home. She was having a little trouble of her own.

They were strolling across the parade in the brilliant moonlight, Grace on her stalwart husband's arm, looking up in his face with all her soul in her eyes, chatting merrily over the events of the day. Miss Sanford was amiably listening to the dissertation of an infantry friend upon astronomical matters, while Gleason was elsewhere escorting Mrs. Whaling. At the door Truscott looked back and hospitably invited the young officer to enter, but the latter doffed his cap and gallantly said something to the effect that all who entered left their hearts behind, and took himself off with the conviction that he had made a glowing impression. It reminded Mrs. Truscott of the stencil inscription over the local Inferno.

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"Oh, Jack! Have you seen Mr. Blake's latest absurdity,—that slangy paraphrase of Dante at the club-room?"

"I heard of it," said Truscott, smilingly. "Who told you of it, Queenie?"

"Why!—I—saw it to-day," she replied, as though suddenly conscious that she had put her foot on forbidden ground. Then, as he said nothing whatever, she went on in anxious explanation: "Mr. Gleason asked us in to have a lemonade on our way from drill. You know the ladies often go, Jack."

"I know some of them do, Gracie."

"Ought we not to have gone—I mean, ought I not to have gone? for Marion would not. Indeed, Jack, the moment I saw she had not come in I left at once. Was it—are you vexed?"

"There's no great harm done, dear. I had not thought to warn you against it, though I knew the others—some of them, went there at times."

"You mean you had not supposed it would be necessary, Jack."

And so, it must be admitted, he had; and poor Grace was in the depths as a natural consequence. It was the first time she had felt that he was disappointed in her, and though the matter was trivial and his loving kiss and caress reassured her, she was plunged in dismay to think that in entering the club-room with Mr. Gleason she had done what he disapproved of, what, as a woman of refined breeding, she should have shunned, and—what Marion *had* declined. She was too much a woman not to feel that therein lay an additional sting; she was too gentle and loving a wife not

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to feel forlorn at thought of having disappointed Jack. Some women would have resented the idea of his objecting to such a thing. (No, fair reader, of course I don't mean you; but is it not just possible I may be right in saying so of Mrs. —— next door?)

Grace had kissed her friend good-night just a wee bit less affectionately than usual, and Marion well knew that husband and wife were best left alone together, as the surest and speediest way of settling the affair. She, therefore, went to her room.

There were only two rooms up-stairs in the little army house, each with its big closet, a door connecting the two, and others opening out on the narrow landing above the stairs; each with its sharply sloping roof and dormer-window. Grace had insisted on her guest's taking the front room, looking out on the parade as she had at the Point; but after much laughing discussion they settled it by pulling straws, as many a question had been decided in the old school days. This reversed the assignment, and the rear room became Miss Sanford's. The view from the window was not attractive. Immediately beneath was the shingle roofing of the dining-room and kitchen annex, stretching out to the servants' rooms and sheds beyond. The yard, like all its fellows, was bare and brown, for nothing would grow on such a soil. Rough, unpainted wooden fences separated them one from another; rough cow-sheds, coal-sheds, or wood-sheds were braced up against the fences, and back of all the yards along the row ran a high rickety barrier of boards, as rough and unprepossessing as the others. Beyond this fence lay a triangular space of open prairie ornamented only by ash-barrels

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and occasional heaps of empty cans awaiting the coming of the "police cart." Beyond this space stood the big brown hospital on the north; the back-yards of the surgeon's and sutler's quarters on the east; while the hypothenuse of the right-angled triangle thus limited was the unsightly fence that bounded the back-yards of officers' row. Mr. Dick Swiveller's delightful view "of over the way" was a gem of landscape in comparison.

But for such gloomy outlook Miss Sanford had little thought. She went to the window to draw the curtain, and far out across the distant prairie slopes, where she could see them at all, the moon was throwing her silvery beams, while closer at hand broad, irregular wastes of blackness sailed over the dry plateau as the clouds that caused them drifted across the dazzling face. Harsh and unlovely as were the surroundings by day, they lost something of their asperity under the softening shimmer of that mystic light. Far down by the stables she could hear the ringing watch-call of the sentries proclaiming half-past twelve o'clock and all well, and then—and then as a cloud floated away and the bright beams poured down in unhindered radiance, she became aware of a form enveloped in a cavalry overcoat standing in the corner of the fence. She could see the moonlight glinting on the polished insignia,—the crossed sabres,—on the front of his forage-cap, and though she could not see the face, she knew it was that of Sergeant Wolf.

Captain and Mrs. Truscott were still below. She could hear them putting out the parlor lamps and locking the doors. She could hear a quick footstep on the hard-

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beaten walk in front and the clink of a scabbard, and knew it must be the officer of the day starting out to make his rounds. So too, apparently, did the mysterious prowler in the back-yard. He stepped quickly out of the enclosure, and the next instant she could see the erect, soldierly figure moving rapidly away towards the northwestern entrance of the post, where lay the band's quarters.

CHAPTER XII.

A SERENADE.

"NEWS from Mr. Ray!" exclaimed Mrs. Stannard, as she came in all smiles and sunshine the morning after the Fourth. "Just think of it, Captain Truscott! the major says they were all wondering when they could hope to get letters from home, when who should come trotting into camp but Ray with a bagful. He found a couple of men at Laramie who had been left behind when the regiment went through, and the three of them slipped off together, and by riding all night managed to escape the Indians. Did you ever know such a reckless fellow?"

Truscott shook his head. "I wish Ray *would* be more prudent. If there were any occasion for such a risk 'twould be a different thing——"

"But there *was*," said Mrs. Stannard, promptly. "The commanding officer at Laramie had received im-

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portant orders for the —th by telegraph, and he didn't know how to get them through. No scouts or runners were in. Ray got there the evening before, and the moment he heard of it he went right to the colonel and begged to be allowed to go. It seems that trouble is expected at the agency," she continued. "The major sends just a few lines to say they expect to leave the Cheyenne valley and go right in there. The pickets have chased Indians coming from the northwest,—runners from Sitting Bull, they say,—and the officers do not like the looks of things."

Truscott's face was very grave but his manner was unchanged. Mrs. Grace and her friend had risen from the breakfast-table to welcome their ex-hostess and valued neighbor, and the three ladies looked as though news from the front brought far more of anxiety than comfort. Before anything further was said there came a light tap at the door, and Mrs. Turner fluttered in, bewitchingly pretty in her white muslin, with bright-colored ribbons. There were ill-natured people who observed at times of Mrs. Turner that she took far more pains with her dress when the captain was away on campaign and "the doughboys" were running the garrison, than she did when her liege lord was at home. Of this we cannot speak advisedly. Certain it is that on this particularly bright, glorious sunshiny morning of the fifth of July in the Centennial year, Mrs. Turner was most becomingly attired.

"I wouldn't have intruded at so unconventional an hour only I saw Mrs. Stannard come running in; I knew she had a letter, and so had I. Isn't it horrid? Captain Turner says it looks as though they might be

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out all summer! Oh, Miss Sanford! I'm so glad you are dressed and ready, for the ambulance is coming around now, and I *know* you and Mrs. Truscott want to go in this morning and see Mrs. Wing's new goods. She opened yesterday, you know, and Mrs. Wilkins says all the bonnets are fresh from New York and lovely. You *will* go, won't you? Come just as you are. You'll only need a light wrap, for the sun is very warm."

Why is it that when one woman knows herself to be tastefully and becomingly dressed, she is so eager to assure others who are to accompany her that they need nothing by way of adornment? The ambulance *was* at the door. The visit to town had been contemplated for two or three days, so matters were quickly arranged. There was abundant room, and Mrs. Stannard decided to go too.

In a few minutes half a dozen ladies in their airy summer costumes were gathered around the Concord wagon, ordinarily referred to as "the ambulance." Mr. Gleason was promptly on hand with other officers to assist; the band was just marching away towards its quarters, when Miss Sanford's quick eye was attracted by the sight of some evident commotion at the adjutant's office at the west end; one soldier was running at full speed in pursuit of the old and new officers of the day, who were descending the slope to the creek valley, another soldier—the commanding officer's orderly—came running down the road towards the party.

She was already seated, as were most of the others. Mrs. Turner sprang lightly in, and coquettishly kissed her hand to the group of officers on the walk.

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"Go on, driver," she said.

"One moment, Mrs. Turner; please wait. I think something is the matter. Look!"

And Miss Sanford pointed to the running men. All eyes were instantly fixed on the orderly. He came up, wellnigh breathless.

"Captain Truscott! gentlemen! The commanding officer's compliments, and desires to see all the officers at once."

The group started at the instant. Truscott turned and held out his hands to his wife.

With the quick intuition of a woman accustomed to "war's alarms," she felt that evil tidings had come, and was already starting to leave the carriage.

"Oh! what can it be?" almost wailed Mrs. Turner. "Do you know, orderly?"

"It's been a big battle, ma'am, and they say General Custer and lots of officers is killed."

Truscott swung his wife from the wagon, and almost lifted her to the piazza. Miss Sanford, white and silent, sprang out unaided and ran to her side. Mrs. Stannard, with an awful dread in her kind blue eyes, took Truscott's hand as he returned and assisted her to alight.

"Will you stay with Grace?" he whispered. "I will go at once to the office. Come, Mrs. Turner."

But Mrs. Turner hung back irresolute. "Perhaps it isn't true at all, captain, and this may be the only time we can have the ambulance for a week."

For answer he silently took her at the waist in his powerful hands, set her speechless with astonishment on the sidewalk, sprang in, and spoke sharply to the driver,—

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"Whirl round. Get there to the office quick as you can."

And the lashed mules went at a gallop.

Entering the office with the customary knock at the open door, Truscott stood first in the presence of the post commander and his adjutant.

"For God's sake read that!" said the colonel, holding up to him some three or four sheets of telegraphic despatch paper. The other officers came hurrying in.

"Read it aloud, Truscott."

And so to the group of speechless officers and to the knot of soldiers who had gathered in the hall the dread news of the battle of the Little Horn was told at Russell. Custer and his five pet companies completely "wiped out," said the staff-officer, who sent the news flashing around to the military posts in the department. Three hundred and twenty-five soldiers swept out of existence only an easy day's gallop in front of the Gray Fox's pickets, and it had taken all this time—ten days—to get the news into civilization. There was no sign of a smile the rest of that long day at Russell. The gloom of death had settled down on the post. The ladies were seen no more. The doctor was sent for in more than one instance. Mrs. Truscott was reported very ill.

But if garrison after garrison was thrown into dismay all over the frontier by the sudden news, who can picture the scene at Lincoln, when at dawn of that dreadful day a sergeant came over from the boat at Bismarck to arouse the people at the hospital and to break the blow to the widows and orphans? Reveille had not sounded when the commanding officer, the adjutant, and a

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surgeon started on the gloomy round of the cavalry garrison. Yesterday we saw those fair, smiling women bravely striving to hide their anxieties and loneliness, and to lend enthusiasm to the celebration of the nation's anniversary. One after another they were startled from the deep slumber of early morning by the knocking at the door,—"the first knell of disaster,"—and who that saw the old Missouri post when the fearful news was finally made known to all will ever forget the scene that ensued? May God avert the possibility of such another!

The day wore gloomily away at Russell. Twice Mr. Gleason called at Captain Truscott's quarters. The second time Mrs. Stannard appeared at the door, and briefly told him that Mrs. Truscott was not well enough to see anybody, and that Miss Sanford begged to be excused. Mrs. Whaling permeated the post in an ecstasy of soulful comfort, shedding prayers and prophecies of similar fortune for the —th with the impartiality of a saint. She even succeeded in scaring Mrs. Turner half to death and exasperating Mrs. Wilkins to the verge of a tirade, but the latter had contented herself with the spirited, though ungrateful announcement that when it came to having hearses and mutes it wouldn't be Mrs. Whaling they'd inquire for. "Matters are bad enough without your making 'em worse, ma'am," she said, in her decided way. And the good lady, longing to deluge somebody with sympathetic tears, was compelled to confine herself to the round of the infantry quarters, where, with the ladies of her own regiment, she could bemoan the unfathomable ingratitude and lack of appreciation of their sisters of the —th.

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Late that afternoon there came more orders and despatches. Truscott and the other cavalry officers were summoned to Colonel Whaling's, where they found most of the infantrymen already assembled. Captain Webb had been called back to Kansas as a witness before a civil court, and to Truscott the order of the division commander was conveyed that he should march with the two troops at Russell without delay, and join the —th wherever he could find them north of the Platte. Three of the four infantry companies would also march for Laramie at dawn. Colonel Whaling, with one small company, the recruits, the band, and the noncombatants, would remain to take charge of the post.

Sending for his first sergeant, Truscott ordered him to have everything put in readiness at once. A man was sent to town to recall all soldiers on pass. There had been no drills during the day. Officers and men alike seemed stunned by the tidings that had come at guard-mounting. He then went to his quarters, and to his young wife's bedside. She was prepared for the news; he had told her during the day that now every available officer and man would be hurried to the front. She was in no danger whatever; it was the shock, the abruptness of the announcement of the orderly, that had so prostrated her. She lay there very pale and still —never taking her soft eyes from his face and holding tightly his hand—as he gently told her all he had to say.

"I cannot be too thankful," he said at last, "that I have Miss Sanford and Mrs. Stannard here to be your companions during the campaign. It will be late in autumn before we can hope to return, my darling."

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Later that evening the young subalterns of his own and Webb's troop came to him for certain instructions as to the mess and baggage arrangements. Mr. Gleason had not appeared since the issuance of the orders to march. Tattoo was just sounding out on the parade, and the men could be seen flitting to and fro against the lights of the company barracks. They were standing at the little gate in front of his quarters, and two or three officers passed them.

"Oh, Mr. Gleason, one moment," called Truscott.

Gleason turned and approached them.

"I presume you will mess with the rest of us,—at least until we reach the regiment. Mr. Wells has been arranging for mess-furniture and supplies."

"Well—er—no, captain," said Gleason, in evident embarrassment. "The fact is the colonel directs that I remain here. *Somebody* has to stay to instruct recruits, and the colonel has settled upon me. It is merely temporary, of course."

Truscott stood looking at him in silence a moment; a dark line was growing between his brows.

"The colonel—er—sent for me just at retreat," Gleason stumbled on; "I assure you I had nothing to say to him to bring about such a thing. It was entirely against my wishes, but orders are orders."

"I am glad to hear you say the order was unsolicited," said the captain shortly. "The colonel will, doubtless, notify me. That is all, Mr. Gleason; I will not detain you."

And Gleason went on his way to the store, which he had lately avoided; he felt that he stood in need of bracing. Still, so far as saying that he had made no

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request of Colonel Whaling, he had told the truth. He had simply represented the detachment of recruits as being utterly demoralized by the news of the massacre, and that he had reason to believe many of them would desert, and as *that* would reflect on the vigilance of the post commander, the latter jumped at what was suggested to him by his far-sighted wife,—the temporary detention of Mr. Gleason to take charge of them. At daybreak on the sixth, Truscott's squadron, of over a hundred horse finely mounted, equipped, and disciplined, was marching rapidly over the ridge to Lodge Pole, leaving Russell—wives and children—behind; leaving to care for them, among others, Gleason and Sergeant Wolf.

Wearily the day of their departure rolled away. Mrs. Truscott never left her room. Mrs. Stannard and Miss Sanford rarely left her. Once or twice had Mr. Gleason called, being met again by Mrs. Stannard, whom he was beginning to hate. "The ladies were resting," he was informed; so, too, was Mrs. Whaling told when she came, and seemed discomfited at not being invited up-stairs. It was difficult, indeed, to persuade her that she had not better remain in the parlor in case Mrs. Truscott should ask for her.

"You see, Mrs. Stannard," explained Gleason, "the last thing I promised Truscott as he rode away was that I would not lose sight of the ladies, would watch over them incessantly, and I want to keep faith with him."

Mrs. Stannard had her doubts as to how much of this statement was true, though she had no doubts as to how much was uncalled for. Mr. Gleason went away

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feeling injured and rebuffed. It was Miss Sanford's business, he held, to come down and see him if only for a moment. He had gained his object in being kept back at the post, that he might pursue his wooing. Satisfied of the wealth and social standing of the lady, he felt no doubt whatever that if given a fair field he could win her, and win her he would. If unlimited conceit has not yet been mentioned or indicated as one of Mr. Gleason's prominent traits, the omission is indeed important. He felt that up to the time of Truscott's coming his progress had been satisfactory. Officers and ladies were already making sly allusions in his presence as to his prospects for a second entanglement, and were heard with complacent undenial. Ever since the day of his aspersion of Ray he had been losing ground, however, and now, confound it! here was Ray looming up as a hero again, making a wild night-ride with despatches. He felt that things must be brought to a crisis speedily. He knew that, properly handled, he had the means of clouding Ray's name with something worse than suspicion. He had already sneeringly replied to the officers who had spoken admiringly of Ray's daring, by saying that Ray was, doubtless, trying to make a record to block matters that were working against him here. Some of his auditors had gone off disgusted. One had plainly said he was sick of insinuations. Now, however, they were all gone, and he had the field practically to himself. The half-dozen officers left at the post would be little apt to interfere with him. Only, he must manage Mrs. Stannard. Gleason took a fortifying glass or two, ordered up his horse, and, late as it was, rode in to Cheyenne. There

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he dropped in at the telegraph-office,—he could have sent it from the adjutant's office just as well,—and, after some deliberation, wrote this despatch:

"WILLARD RALLSTON, Esq., Omaha.

"Why no letter? When you coming? Act now. Ferguson gone.

"G."

Being in town he dropped in at one or two places of popular resort, and had more or less conversation with the hangers-on at the open bars. He drank more freely than usual, too, and while by no means off his balance, mentally or physically, when at midnight he turned his horse's head homewards, he was rather more capable of any deed of meanness than would ordinarily have been deemed expedient. His quarters reached, he stood for a moment gazing along the dark and silent row. Suddenly, soft and sweet on the clear night air he heard the notes of a guitar, then a tenor voice, well trained, rich and melodious. He well knew there was no officer in the garrison who could sing like that. Who was it? Where was it?

Slipping through the back-yard and keeping close under the high board fence, Mr. Gleason tiptoed up the row until behind Truscott's. A convenient knot-hole enabled him to peer through, and his eye lit on the dim figure of a man enveloped in cavalry overcoat standing beneath the rear window. This, then, was the troubadour.

A moment or two previous, Miss Sanford, wearied after a long day of anxiety and care, was roused from a broken sleep by a soft, sweet tenor voice beneath her

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window, and the tinkling accompaniment of a guitar. Each word came floating through the silent night,—

"Rings Stille herscht—es schweigt der Wald,
Vollendet ist des Tages Lauf;
Der Vögleins Lied ist längst verhallt,
Am Himmel ziehn die Sterne auf.
Schlaf wohl, schlaf wohl,
Und schliess die schönen Augen zu;
Schlaf wohl, schlaf wohl,
Du süsser, lieber Engel Du."

She knew instantly who it must be. She noiselessly slipped to the door leading into Grace's chamber, and the dim night-light showed her sweet friend sound asleep. Returning, she crept to the window, shrouded as it was by the inner curtain. No sign would she give that the song was heard, but what woman would not have risked one peep? Finishing his song, the serenader turned on his heel, gave one long, lingering look at the darkened window, then strode out of the rear gate and away towards the band quarters. Drawing the curtain farther aside, Miss Sanford plainly recognized the walk and bearing. She followed him with her eyes until he had gone full a hundred yards, was about to let fall the curtain, when, crouching like panther, sneaking from shadow to shadow, there slipped past the gate the dim figure of a second man in stealthy pursuit. Who could this be? The first, of course, was Sergeant Wolf.

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CHAPTER XIII.

SURROUNDED.

"ONE thing is certain: we ought to get word over to Wayne or he'll be cut off." The speaker was old Stannard, and his auditors were a knot of half a dozen officers of the —th. It was just daybreak, cold, crisp, and clear. It was about a week after the news of the battle of the Little Horn had reached the regiment. Already its two strongest battalions were marching to join Crook at the Big Horn, but a little squadron—two troops under command of Captain Wayne—lay nearly two days' march away, lower down the broad valley towards the southeast. The tidings that had come by special couriers were exciting, even alarming. A great outbreak had occurred among the Indians still at the agencies on White River. Nearly a thousand of the Southern Cheyennes, who had nothing whatever to do with the quarrel of Sitting Bull and his people, who had no grievance whatever against the government, but had been fed, clothed, petted, and pampered for six or eight years, and who up to this time remained at the reservations, had become so emboldened at the success of the renegades and warriors in the Big Horn country, so envious of their great massacre of Custer and his men, that they had suddenly thrown off all disguise, loaded up with all the provisions, arms, and ammunition they could buy or steal, and had jumped for the

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Northwest, murdering and pillaging as they went. Waiting no orders, dropping, indeed, the retrograde movement he was ordered to make before this outbreak was known, the regimental commander had turned his columns and shot "cross country" on a night march to head them off. A soldier who doubted the "grit" of his officers and men, who was himself indisposed to dare so strong and savage a foe, could easily have taken refuge in these orders and, marching as directed, avoid the Cheyennes entirely. They were known to be the fiercest, sharpest, trickiest fighters of the plains, full of pluck and science, superb horsemen, fine shots, splendidly mounted and equipped. A foe, indeed, the average man would think twice before "tackling," especially in the light of the fearful exhibition of Indian prowess of the 25th of June. But the leader of the —th never thought twice. No sooner did the breathless couriers reach him with the news than he formed his plans instanter. Within an hour every horse and man in the —th seemed to know they had a race and a fight ahead. Eighty miles of rough country to ride over before they could strike the line on which the Cheyennes were moving, and then the —th could speak for themselves. The news of the tragedy of the Little Horn came like a stunning blow to many a fellow who had lost old and tried comrades in the fray; but while laugh and jest seemed banished for the time, there was no doubting the spirit of the regiment for the coming business. They had turned sharply from their course late in the afternoon of the previous day, had marched nearly all night, had halted to make coffee and give the horses water and a good feed as they reached the sheltering

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cottonwoods by the stream; and now, while some of the officers with their field-glasses were lying prone upon the commanding ridges studying the distant valley for signs, another party was gathered here around the colonel, who had been having a brief chat with "old Stannard."

"Wayne has been warned by this time. I sent two of the scouts across from the Rawhide last evening," was the colonel's quiet reply to the impulsive outburst of his junior.

"He is off their line of march entirely, I know," admitted Stannard, "but those fellows have had eyes out in every direction. They know just where he is. They know just where that wagon-train is, and up to last evening they knew just where we were, though they are puzzled now, I reckon. All I'm afraid of is that the moment they find we're not in supporting distance, they'll drop what they're after and turn on Wayne. He ought to be only forty odd miles down this valley,—considerably off their line,—and if he has kept close and not fooled away his time he is safe enough; but Wayne is Wayne, colonel, and I've known him to go poking off on side scouts and losing time 'topogging' over pretty country when he ought to have been making tracks for home." (Stannard *would* use the vernacular of the frontier when at all excited.) "Now it would be just like Wayne to have lost a day in just such a manner. I hope not,—but I fear it."

"He has Ray with him," suggested Captain Turner.

"I know that; but Wayne is butt-headed as a billy-goat on some points, and one is that he can't be taught anything about Indians. He's as innocent and unsus-

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picious and incapable of appreciating their wiles as the average Secretary of the Interior; and Wayne isn't the kind of man to be influenced by Ray's opinions. He'd be more apt to tell Ray to keep them to himself. It couldn't be helped, of course, but it's a pity two companies had to be sent on that scout. I'd feel safer under Ray with one troop than under Wayne with two."

"I confess I wish we could see just where they were and what they were doing," said the colonel, with an anxious look on his sun-blistered face; "but we have our hands full as it is. Come, Mr. Adjutant, it's time we were off! Get the men in saddle and have the arms and ammunition inspected,—fifty rounds to the man, at least. Major Stannard, where would you locate Truscott's command this morning? I shall send couriers back from here to find him and tell him to join Wayne."

To join Wayne! Well, just at that particular moment Wayne was wishing that he might,—or somebody equally strong. And if the colonel could but have seen the fix that doughty dragoon was in—fifty miles away—the concern on his ruddy face would have been intensified. Wayne had succeeded in justifying everything Stannard had said of him. He had, indeed, been "fooling away his time" on side scouts, and now, before he had fairly dreamed of the possibility of such a thing, the hills around him were alive with Indians.

Ray, with his troop, had been assigned to the captain's command for a scout of some importance over towards the reservations three days before this unlucky morning. Rumors of the disaffection of the Cheyennes had come to the colonel. Everybody knew that

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the Indians would be wild with delight over the news from Sitting Bull. Indeed, there was reason to believe that it was being whispered at the reservations before the telegraph flashed the tidings broadcast on the 5th of July. Were there not two days there on the Mini Pusa—the 2d and 3d of July—when little parties of Indians were chased towards as well as from the White River? Wayne's orders were to scout the valley and report whether Indians were venturing out that way. Before he had been two days away from the regiment he found trail after trail of war-parties crossing the valley northward. Signal-smokes and night-fires were in the hills beyond. The evidence was conclusive to expert eyes, but Wayne said that, all told, no more than one hundred warriors could have gone out. He was bent on going farther and seeing how many more there were. Ray, as second in rank among the five officers present, ventured to suggest that they had seen quite enough, and that without delay they should either return directly to the regiment or send word. Wayne would not send because only a hundred tracks had been seen, and by the time he had run over double that number the two scouts with them refused to go back. "We would be cut off and killed, sure as fate," was their comprehensive reason. They bivouacked that night in the timber, keeping out strong guards and pickets, but with early dawn were astir, moving back up the valley. Once again had Ray offered a suggestion,—that they should put back during the night, but Wayne was nettled at the fact that Ray's prophecy had come true. They had stayed too long and gone too far. He was a John Bull sort of fellow,

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full of the ponderous, bumptious courage which prompts the men of that illustrious island empire to be shot down like cattle by Boers and Zulus and Arabs and Afghans, adhering rigidly to the tactics of Waterloo to fight the scientific light troops of the savages sooner than depart from that which was the conventional British method of making war. Wayne was lacking only in moral courage. He was afraid to say he was wrong and Ray was right. Before they had gone two miles he was forced to admit it. He was hemmed in on every side.

The valley had narrowed considerably just here, and the bare, rounded bluffs came down to within two hundred and fifty yards of the timber along the stream. Willows in sparse groups and cottonwoods in sun-bleached foliage were scattered along the level bench on both sides of the river-bed. Broad wastes of sand extended in places from bank to bank, and what water there was lay in heated pools. Here and there the white incrustation on the sand told of the strongly alkaline nature of the soil and the consequent impurity of the fluid. The little column, with scouts well out on front and flanks, was moving four abreast up the south bank along their trail of the previous day. Every now and then some officer or man would note a new signal-smoke puffing up to the sky among the hills some distance off the valley, and Wayne was riding in rather sulky dignity at the head of the command. He had come to the conclusion that he had done an idiotic thing the morning previous, in pushing on down the valley after discovering beyond question that so many Indians were already on the move. He well knew that Ray was the last man in the regiment to

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counsel avoiding danger, unless it were danger which would prove overwhelming and for encountering which there could be no excuse. He *knew* he had been idiotic now, for he could see indications that Indians were closing in on him from every side; but, worse than that, he knew that he had added to his idiocy a performance that was simply asinine: he had lost his temper and said an outrageous thing to Ray, and some of the men had heard it. From earliest dawn the lieutenant had been out with the pickets eagerly scanning the surrounding country. Indians, of course, were not to be seen. They kept out of sight behind the bluffs and ridges, but their signals were floating skyward from half a dozen different points, and Ray knew it meant that they were calling in their forces to concentrate on this lone command. At last he had gone to Wayne, who was sipping his coffee with as much deliberation as though the troops had nothing on earth to do all day.

"Captain Wayne. May I ask if anything further has been done towards getting word back to the regiment?"

Wayne looked curiously at his junior a moment. He had the unpleasant conviction that whatever his own views might be, the regiment generally would be more apt to back Ray's opinions as to the chances in Indian fighting than they would his. He could not complain of the lieutenant's manner in the least, but all the same he felt certain that Ray had a higher opinion of his own judgment than he had of his, the squadron commander's. It was time to take him down.

"Why do you ask, Ray?" he said, with assumed

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composure, setting down his tin cup and motioning tc the attendant that he desired to have it refilled.

"Because—we are now pretty well hemmed in, and unless word *has* gone, there will be little chance of sending any."

"Well, Mr. Ray, why *should* we send any?"

"Because, Captain Wayne, we have neither ammunition nor provisions for a siege, and the chances are in favor of our having to stand one."

"Oh, trash! Ray. I expected more nerve of you, and you are the first man in the crowd to get stampeded."

For an instant there was danger of an explosion. Ray's eyes blazed with wrath. He would have burst into a fury of denunciation, captain or no captain, but there—close at hand—stood many silent groups of the men. For once in his life Ray said not a word. For one long ten seconds he stood there, looking Wayne straight in the eye, then turned on his heel and left him.

The captain would have given much to recall the words. He knew their utter injustice. He knew, worse luck! that if they succeeded in getting back to the —th in safety, about the very first thing he would be called upon to do would be to eat them. For the moment he was Ray's commanding officer and there was no resenting them; but once back with the —th, then there *would* be fun!

Wayne rode for the first mile or so in sulky dignity, as has been said. Ray was out in front with the scouts. He had gone without saying a word to the commander, and though that was a breach of etiquette, the captain

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well knew that there of all others was the place for Ray to be. None of his other subalterns came near him. There were only two,—Dana and Hunter,—and they were riding each at the head of the troop to which he was attached. A young assistant surgeon was with the party, and a civilian who had charge of the half-dozen pack-mules ambling alongside, but even these men seemed indisposed to chat with the commanding officer. The column was riding "at ease," but in silence. No whistling, joking, or singing was going on. To the right was the timber through which, well to the front, half a dozen skirmishers were pushing so as to secure the main body against surprise. To the left, full eight hundred yards away, rose the low line of bluffs, sweeping around the left front so as to approach the stream. Two or three men rode warily along their crest, keeping sharp lookout to the south, while scattered across the valley a like distance ahead were half a dozen active troopers, the two guides, and Ray. The latter, easily recognized at that distance by his riding and by "Dandy's" elastic stride, had discarded his coat, and was moving rapidly from point to point in his dark-blue scouting-shirt.

Nearing the bluffs that bent around their front, it could be seen that the guides were hanging back a little, so were the skirmishers in advance; but the men on the flanks pushed ahead. No Indians could be seen from their more elevated position.

"They're shy of that bluff," said Wayne between his teeth. "Here, Mr. Dana, send a sergeant and two sets of fours forward, and stir them up a little. Wait a moment! There goes Ray."

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Sure enough, Ray and a couple of horsemen, opening out considerably, could be seen spurring diagonally across the bottom towards a point of bluffs that rose higher than the general line off to the left. Before they had gone two hundred yards, out from the very crest of the bluff there leaped half a dozen quick puffs of smoke; half a dozen little spirts of dust and sand flew up from the prairie near the three horsemen farthest to the front, two of whose steeds were seen to veer and shy violently, and then six sharp, spiteful, half-muffled reports were borne on the still air.

Even before the shots were heard Wayne was turning in his saddle.

"Deploy to the front, Dana; only your first platoon," he added, as the young officer was about throwing forward the whole troop. "Look out for the bluffs on your left. I'll have Hunter face them. Half front your line that way so as not to let them enfilade you. I'm going right out to the front." With that he rode back, said a few words to Hunter, and then, followed by his orderly trumpeter, went thumping off at ponderous gallop towards his distant advance.

Almost at the same instant the flankers on the bluffs to the left were seen waving their hats and spurring about in violent excitement, pointing towards the south. Then they fired two or three wild shots in that direction, and, ducking as though to avoid return fire, came sweeping down the slopes at full speed.

It was stirring to mark the bearing of the little command just then. Every man knew that the unseen foe was present in front and flank in heavy force. Every hand seemed nerved to sudden strength. The

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horses tossed their heads and pricked up their ears, looking eagerly in the direction of the firing. In obedience to his orders, Dana was rapidly deploying his leading platoon, and a sheaf of skirmishers went scattering out to the front in support of the advance, while Hunter, left for the moment alone, divined in an instant that the Indians were coming with a rush upon the southern flank. He wheeled his fours to the left, and, dismounting his skirmishers, sent them at the double-quick out across the prairie. Not an instant too soon! Almost simultaneously the ridge to the south, the bluffs out in front, and even the narrow level between them and the timber fairly bristled with daring, dashing horsemen,—the Cheyennes in all their glory.

Oh, what a brilliant sight they made with plume and pennon, floating war-bonnet, lance and shield; the sunlight dancing on their barbaric ornaments of glistening brass or silver, on brightly-painted, naked forms, on the trappings of their nimble ponies, on rifle and spear! All at full speed, all ayell, brandishing their weapons, firing wildly into the valley, leaping, some of them, for an instant to the ground to take better aim, then, like a flash, to saddle and top speed again; through every little swale, over every ridge they popped like so many savage Jacks-in-the-box, and came swooping, circling down on the little column at the old-time tactics of the stampede. Warily though, with all their clamor, for though they whoop and yell and shoot and challenge, they veer off to right or left long before they get within dangerous range of those silent skirmishers of Hunter's, now sprawling in long blue line out on the dusty prairie, *ventre à terre*, and every fellow with his car-

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bine at the front just praying the painted scamps will come a little closer. Warily in front, too, where Ray is skilfully retiring, face to the foe, but keeping them back while Wayne has time to return to the column and move his horses into the sheltering timber and prepare for vigorous defence.

It is the only course now open to him. This is not civilized warfare, remember, and far different rules must govern. It would be no difficult matter against ordinary troops to lead a dashing charge, cut through the opposing line, and so make his way back to the regiment. Of course many men might be unhorsed and wounded, and so left behind, but they would be cared for as prisoners until exchanged or the war was at an end. But war with the Indian means, on his side, war *à outrance*,—war to the cruellest death he can devise. When *he* is cornered, all he has to do is surrender and become the recipient of more attention and the victim of higher living than he ever dreamed of until he tried it, and found it so pleasant that it paid him to go on the war-path every spring, to have a royal old revel in blood and bestiality until fall, and then yield to the blandishments of civilization for the winter. But to officer or soldier capture means death, and death by fiendish torture as a rule. The Indian fights for the glory and distinction it gives him. He has everything to gain and nothing to lose. The soldier of the United States fights the red man only because he is ordered to. He has nothing to gain—even glory, for the Senate has fixed a bar sinister on gallantry in Indian warfare. He has everything to lose. However, no words of mine will ever effect a change of political

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heart in such matters. The fact remains that the one thing left for Wayne to do—finding himself intercepted by some two hundred Cheyennes—was to take to the timber and stand them off.

By this time the fray was spirited and picturesque in the extreme. The whole line of bluffs was alive with Indians dashing to and fro, occasionally swooping down as though to burst through or over the slender skirmish line. Others had swung clear around to the left, and were circling about in the valley below them. From all but the north side, therefore, the bullets came whistling in, and occasionally some stricken horse would plunge and snort madly, and one or two men were being assisted to the bank of the stream, where the young doctor had already gone to work. Hunter's dismounted men, sturdily fronting the south and southeast, were holding five times their force in check, while Ray's and Dana's mounted skirmishers, fronting southwest and west, were slowly falling back fighting. The Cheyennes encircled them on every side but the north.

Busy in getting his horses into shelter under the bank, which was a few feet high, and directing where the provisions and pack-mules should be placed, Wayne was suddenly accosted by Ray.

"If twenty men can be spared, sir, I'll put them on that island," pointing to a clump of willows and cottonwoods that stood along the opposite shore. "The Indians are crossing above and below, and we'll soon have their fire on our backs."

Wayne was soldier enough to see the force of the suggestion. He was man enough, too, to want to ask Ray's pardon for his language of the morning, but there

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was only time to accede to the request. The Kentuckian, still mounted on Dandy, was darting across the sandy space with a dozen or more of his men at his heels. The island was a Godsend. In less than five minutes the warriors who had ventured across, and were now seeking for a shot at the safety-roost along under the bank, were met by a score of well-aimed bullets that drove them to cover, dragging with them the lifeless body of one of their number.

"Spread out there, men!" shouted Wayne. "Seize every point you can get on t'other shore. Run upstream fifty yards or so and scoop holes for yourselves in the sand." And then he rode out to the front again to superintend the retirement of his slender lines.

But all this time the firing had been rapid and almost incessant. As the troopers came slowly in towards the timber and the Cheyennes realized that it was impossible to drive them into panic or stampede, they seemed to give far more attention to the accuracy of their aim, and for this purpose the best shots had thrown themselves from their ponies and were striving to pick off the officers and prominent sergeants. Still, the greater number remained in saddle whooping and yelling and darting to and fro at a comparatively safe distance, banging away at anything or anybody within the soldier lines, and offering tempting though difficult marks for the sorely-tried skirmishers. Until he noted the distant war-parties crossing to the north side of the stream, Ray had been riding up and down the lines checking the useless waste of ammunition. Everywhere his voice could be heard, placid, almost laughing

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at times, as he rebuked the senseless long-range shooting of the men.

"Hold your fire, men. You can't hit those skipping jack-rabbits half a mile away. What on earth are you shooting at, Mulligan? You couldn't hit a whole barn at that distance."

But all the same he was seriously worried. He knew well that at the utmost there were no more than fifty rounds per man with the troopers, and that rapid firing would soon reduce this to next to nothing. The indications were that once hemmed in to the timber they would need every shot to stand off the Cheyennes until relief could come, and before galloping off to secure the timbered island in rear of their position and so form a partially protected "corral" for the horses, he had cautioned Dana and Hunter to be most sparing in their fire,—to allow no shot unless the Indians charged.

The foe, on the contrary, were flush with ammunition. Mr. ——'s cartridges were abundant among them, and from east, south, and west the bullets were whizzing overhead, ripping up little grass tufts from the prairie and raising a dust wherever they struck. The mounted skirmishers sheered off into the timber quite early, as they were being shot at from three sides, sprang from their horses and took to the trees, but before they could do so several casualties had occurred. Six horses were lying dead out on the prairie, others were wounded and bleeding, but worse than that, two old Arizona sergeants, veterans of a dozen fights, and five of the men were severely wounded. Ray's efforts to keep down the return fire were futile. As long as the men had cartridges and he was not about, they would fire. Just

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as Wayne the second time rode out to the front he found Dana slowly dismounting.

"Are you hit?" he asked.

Dana nodded, pressed his hand to his side, and saying nothing, walked up to a neighboring cottonwood and leaned against it, looking rather pale.

"Damn the luck!" growled Wayne. "This won't do. I must get the whole crowd under cover."

"You get under yourself," grinned Dana. "That hat of yours looks like a sieve now. Yi-ip! There goes your horse." And forgetting his own pain, he strove to aid the captain, whose horse had suddenly plunged forward, and was now rolling and kicking in the agony of death.

"I'm all right, Dana. Poor old Ned! he's carried me many a mile. Here, sergeant, help the lieutenant back to the doctor. Go, Dana! I'll get the men where they belong. We're all right, once we get in the timber."

And so, little by little, slowly and steadily the skirmishers fell back to the shelter of the trees. There in big semicircle they were distributed, each in a little, hastily constructed rifle-pit or shelter of his own, and by nine o'clock this bright July morning the first phase of the combat was at an end, and there was time to "take account of stock."

Dana was shot through the side by a Henry or Winchester bullet, and was lying under the bank faint, thirsty, but plucky. Sergeant Gwinn and two of the men were dead, and eight men now needed the care of the surgeon; three of them were senseless, probably mortally hurt. At least fifteen horses were killed or

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rendered useless; the others were "corralled" under the bank, where, in a deep bend, they were safe except from long-range fire. Ray's men on the island had improved their advantage by seizing defensible positions on the north bank, and, as against two hundred and fifty Indians, with two days' rations left, with abundant water to be had by digging in the sand, with pluck and spirit left for anything, they were not badly off, provided the Indians were not heavily reinforced and provided their ammunition held out.

The Cheyennes now resorted to other tactics. Leaving but few warriors scurrying about on the open prairie, both north and south, they gathered in force in the timber up- and down-stream and began their stealthy approaches, keeping up all the time a sharp fire upon Wayne's position. Every now and then would come a frantic cry from some stricken horse as a random bullet took effect, but few struck among the men. The surgeon and the wounded were well sheltered in a concave hollow of the bank.

There was fortunately little wind. With a gale blowing either up- or down-stream, the Indians could have fired the timber and soon driven them out. This was well understood on both sides. But the besieged knew as well that other methods would be resorted to, and speedily they were developed. The rattling fire that had been kept up ever since the first assault had died away to an occasional shot, when suddenly from the down-stream side there came a volley, a chorus of frantic yells, and then a pandemonium of shots, shouts, howls, and screeches, answered by the soldiers with their carbines and the billingsgate of some irrepressible

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humorist. A savage attack had begun on Hunter's men. Even as Wayne and Ray, bending low to avoid the storm, went scurrying through the trees to his assistance, followed by some half a dozen of the "old hands," there came from up-stream just such another assault, and in ten seconds every able man in the command was hotly engaged.

"For God's sake, captain, don't let them waste their fire!" shouted Ray. "I'll go back to the other front and hold them there."

"All right! I understand, Ray. You watch the same thing over there," answered Wayne, who at another time would have resented any suggestions, but had seen the value of Ray's words a dozen times that day. "Damn it! men. Fire slow. Don't throw away a shot. *Let* them come closer; that's what we want," he shouted to the soldiers, who, lying behind logs or kneeling among the trees, were driving their missiles through the timber, where the smoke-wreaths told of the otherwise invisible foe. Out on the prairie, too, the mounted warriors went careering about, dashing at full speed towards the woods, as though determined to charge, but invariably veering off to right or left as they came within three hundred yards. Of course, there was no direction from which the bullets did not come whizzing into the timber, and men were more likely to be hit in the back than elsewhere,—one of the many disheartening features of such warfare. Almost every moment somebody *was* hit, though at the time it could not be seen or known, as all were too busy with what was in their front to look around. Once in a while, too, some lucky shot would send an

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Indian pony to his knees out on the prairie, or a warrior would drop and be borne off by a ducking, dodging trio of his fellows. Then there would be a shout of triumph from the timber, answering yells of rage and defiance from the foe; but finally, after nearly an hour of such savage work, the Cheyennes seemed to give it up. Then came another respite, another "taking of stock."

One of the scouts, one who had refused to try and ride through to the regiment, was shot dead, and lay on his face among the trees. So, too, were two more of the men, while six were wounded, and Wayne himself had a flesh wound in the thigh. The hot sun of noonday was pouring down, and matters looked ugly.

"Do you know how much ammunition we have left?" asked Mr. Ray, in a low tone, of the commanding officer about an hour later.

"No," said Wayne, looking anxiously in his face.

"Not twelve rounds to the man."

CHAPTER XIV.

RAY'S RIDE FOR LIFE.

DARKNESS has settled down in the shadowy Wyoming valley. By the light of a tiny fire under the bank some twenty forms can be seen stretched upon the sand, —they are wounded soldiers. A little distance away are nine others, shrouded in blankets: they are the dead. Huddled in confused and cowering group are a

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few score horses, many of them sprawled upon the sand motionless; others occasionally struggle to rise or plunge about in their misery. Crouching among the timber, vigilant but weary, dispersed in big, irregular circle around the beleaguered bivouac, some sixty soldiers are still on the active list. All around them, vigilant and vengeful, lurk the Cheyennes. Every now and then the bark as of a coyote is heard,—a yelping, querulous cry,—and it is answered far across the valley or down the stream. There is no moon; the darkness is intense, though the starlight is clear, and the air so still that the galloping hoofs of the Cheyenne ponies far out on the prairie sound close at hand.

"That's what makes it hard," says Ray, who is bending over the prostrate form of Captain Wayne. "If it were storming or blowing, or something to deaden the hoof-beats, I could make it easier; but it's the only chance."

The only chance of what?

When the sun went down upon Wayne's timber citadel, and the final account of stock was taken for the day, it was found that with one-fourth of the command, men and horses, killed and wounded there were left not more than three hundred cartridges, all told, to enable some sixty men to hold out until relief could come against an enemy encircling them on every side, and who had only to send over to the neighboring reservation—forty miles away—and get all the cartridges they wanted. Mr. —— would let their friends have them to kill buffalo, though Mr. —— and their friends knew there wasn't a buffalo left within four hundred miles.

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They *could* cut through, of course, and race up the valley to find the —th, but they would have to leave the wounded and the dismounted behind,—to death by torture,—so that ended the matter. Only one thing remained. In some way—by some means—word must be carried to the regiment. The chances were ten to one against the couriers slipping out. Up and down the valley, out on the prairie on both sides of the stream, the Cheyennes kept vigilant watch. They had their hated enemies in a death-grip, and only waited the coming of other warriors and more ammunition to finish them—as the Sioux had finished Custer. *They* knew, though the besieged did not, that, the very evening before, the —th had marched away westward, and were far from their comrades. All they had to do was to prevent any one's escaping to give warning of the condition of things in Wayne's command. All, therefore, were on the alert, and of this there was constant indication. The man or men who made the attempt would have to run the gauntlet. The one remaining scout who had been employed for such work refused the attempt as simply madness. He had lived too long among the Indians to dare it, yet Wayne and Ray and Dana and Hunter, and the whole command, for that matter, knew that some one *must* try it. Who was it to be?

There was no long discussion. Wayne called the sulking scout a damned coward, which consoled him somewhat, but didn't help matters. Ray had been around the rifle-pits taking observations. Presently he returned, leading Dandy up near the fire,—the one sheltered light that was permitted.

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"Looks fine as silk, don't he?" he said, smoothing his pet's glossy neck and shoulder, for Ray's groom had no article of religion which took precedence over the duty he owed the lieutenant's horse, and no sooner was the sun down than he had been grooming him as though still in garrison. "Give him all the oats you can steal, Hogan; some of the men must have a hatful left."

Wayne looked up startled.

"Ray, I can't let you go!"

"There's no helping it. Some one *must* go, and who can you send?"

Even there the captain noted the grammatical eccentricity. What was surprising was that even there he made no comment thereon. He was silent. Ray had spoken truth. There was no one whom he could order to risk death in breaking his way out since the scout had said 'twas useless. There were brave men there who would gladly try it had they any skill in such matters, but that was lacking. "If any man in the command could 'make it,' that man was Ray." He was cool, daring, keen; he was their best and lightest rider, and no one so well knew the country or better knew the Cheyennes. Wayne even wished that Ray might volunteer. There was only this about it,—the men would lose much of their grit with him away. They swore by him, and felt safe when he was there to lead or encourage. But the matter was settled by Ray himself. He was already stripping for the race.

"Get those shoes off," he said to the farrier, who came at his bidding, and Dandy wonderingly looked up from the gunny-sack of oats in which he had buried

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his nozzle. "What on earth could that blacksmith mean by tugging out his shoe-nails?" was his reflection, though, like the philosopher he was, he gave more thought to his oats,—an unaccustomed luxury just then.

There seemed nothing to be said by anybody. Wayne rose painfully to his feet. Hunter stood in silence by, and a few men grouped themselves around the little knot of officers. Ray had taken off his belt and was poking out the carbine-cartridges from the loops,—there were not over ten. Then he drew the revolver, carefully examined the chambers to see that all were filled; motioned with his hand to those on the ground, saying, quietly, "Pick those up. Y'all may need every one of 'em." The Blue Grass dialect seemed cropping out the stronger for his preoccupation. "Got any spare Colts?" he continued, turning to Wayne. "I only want another round." These he stowed as he got them in the smaller loops on the right side of his belt. Then he bent forward to examine Dandy's hoofs again.

"Smooth them off as well as you can. Get me a little of that sticky mud there, one of you men. There! ram that into every hole and smooth off the surface. Make it look just as much like a pony's as you know how. They can't tell Dandy's tracks from their own then, don't you see?"

Three or four pairs of hands worked assiduously to do his bidding. Still, there was no talking. No one had anything he felt like saying just then.

"Who's got the time?" he asked.

Wayne looked at his watch, bending down over the fire.

"Just nine fifteen."

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"All right. I must be off in ten minutes. The moon will be up at eleven."

Dandy had finished the last of his oats by this time and was gazing contentedly about him. Ever since quite early in the day he had been in hiding down there under the bank. He had received only one trifling clip, though for half an hour at least he had been springing around where the bullets flew thickest. He was even pining for his customary gallop over the springy turf, and wondering why it had been denied him that day.

"Only a blanket and surcingle," said Ray, to his orderly, who was coming up with the heavy saddle and bags. "We're riding to win to-night, Dandy and I, and must travel light."

He flung aside his scouting hat, knotted the silk handkerchief he took from his throat so as to confine the dark hair that came tumbling almost into his eyes, buckled the holster-belt tightly round his waist, looked doubtfully an instant at his spurs, but decided to keep them on. Then he turned to Wayne.

"A word with you, captain."

The others fell back a short distance, and for a moment the two stood alone speaking in low tones. All else was silent except the feverish moan of some poor fellow lying sorely wounded in the hollow, or the occasional pawing and stir among the horses. In the dim light of the little fire the others stood watching them. They saw that Wayne was talking earnestly, and presently extended his hand, and they heard Ray. somewhat impatiently, say, "Never mind that now," and noted that at first he did not take the hand; but finally they came back to the group and Ray spoke:

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"Now, fellows, just listen a minute. I've got to break out on the south side. I know it better. Of course there are no end of Indians out there, but most of the crowd are in the timber above and below. There will be plenty on the watch, and it isn't possible that I can gallop out through them without being heard. Dandy and I have got to sneak for it until we're spotted, or clear of them, then away we go. I hope to work well out towards the bluffs before they catch a glimpse of me, then lie flat and go for all I'm worth to where we left the regiment. Then you bet it won't be long before the old crowd will be coming down just a humping. I'll have 'em here by six o'clock, if, indeed, I don't find them coming ahead to-night. Just you keep up your grit, and we'll do our level best, Dandy and I; won't we, old boy? Now I want to see Dana a minute and the other wounded fellows." And he went and bent down over them saying a cheery word to each; and rough, suffering men held out feeble hands to take a parting grip, and looked up into his brave young eyes. He had long known how the rank and file regarded him, but had been disposed to laugh it off. To-night as he stopped to say a cheering word to the wounded, and looked down at some pale, bearded face that had stood at his shoulder in more than one tight place in the old Apache days in Arizona, and caught the same look of faith and trust in him, something like a quiver hovered for a minute about his lips, and his own brave eyes grew moist. They knew he was daring death to save them, but that was a view of the case that did not seem to occur to him at all. At last he came to Dana lying there a little apart. The news

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that Ray was going to "ride for them" had been whispered all through the bivouac by this time, and Dana turned and took Ray's hand in both his own.

"God speed you, old boy! If you make it all safe, get word to mother that I didn't do so badly in my first square tussel, will you?"

"If I make it, you'll be writing it yourself this time to-morrow night. Even if I don't make it, don't you worry, lad. The colonel and Stannard ain't the fellows to let us shift for ourselves with the country full of Cheyennes. They'll be down here in two days, anyhow. Good-by, Dana; keep your grip and we'll larrup 'em yet."

Then he turned back to Wayne, Hunter, and the doctor.

"One thing occurs to me, Hunter. You and six or eight men take your carbines and go up-stream with a dozen horses until you come to the rifle-pits. Be all ready. If I get clear through you won't hear any row, but if they sight or hear me before I get through, then, of course, there will be the biggest kind of an excitement, and you'll hear the shooting. The moment it begins give a yell; fire your guns; go whooping up the stream with the horses as though the whole crowd were trying to cut out that way, *but get right back.* The excitement will distract them and help me. Now, good-by, and good luck to you, crowd."

"Ray, will you have a nip before you try it? You must be nearly used up after this day's work." And Wayne held out his flask to him.

"No. I had some hot coffee just ten minutes ago, and I feel like a four-year-old. I'm riding new

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colors; didn't you know it? By Jove!" he added, suddenly, "this is my first run under the Preakness blue." Even there and then he thought too quickly to speak her name. "Now, then, some of you crawl out to the south edge of the timber with me, and lie flat on the prairie and keep me in sight as long as you can." He took one more look at his revolver. "I'm drawing to a bob-tail. If I fail, I'll bluff; if I fill, I'll knock spots out of any threes in the Cheyenne outfit."

Three minutes more and the watchers at the edge of the timber have seen him, leading Dandy by the bridle, slowly, stealthily, creeping out into the darkness; a moment the forms of man and horse are outlined against the stars: then, are swallowed up in the night. Hunter and the sergeants with him grasp their carbines and lie prone upon the turf, watching, waiting.

In the bivouac is the stillness of death. Ten soldiers —carbine in hand—mounted on their unsaddled steeds are waiting in the darkness at the upper rifle-pits for Hunter's signal. If he shout, every man is to yell and break for the front. Otherwise, all is to remain quiet. Back at the watch-fire under the bank Wayne is squatting, watch in one hand, pistol in the other. Near by lie the wounded, still as their comrades just beyond,—the dead. All around among the trees and in the sand-pits up- and down-stream, fourscore men are listening to the beating of their own hearts. In the distance, once in a while, is heard the yelp of coyote or the neigh of Indian pony. In the distance, too, are the gleams of Indian fires, but they are far beyond the positions occupied by the besieging warriors. Dark-

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ness shrouds them. Far aloft the stars are twinkling through the cool and breezeless air. With wind, or storm, or tempest, the gallant fellow whom all hearts are following would have something to favor, something to aid; but in this almost cruel stillness nothing under God can help him,—nothing but darkness and his own brave spirit.

"If I get through this scrape in safety," mutters Wayne between his set teeth, "the —th shall never hear the last of this work of Ray's."

"If I get through this night," mutters Ray to himself, far out on the prairie now, where he can hear tramping hoofs and guttural voices, "it will be the best run ever made for the Sanford blue, though I do make it."

Nearly five minutes have passed, and the silence has been unbroken by shot or shout. The suspense is becoming unbearable in the bivouac, where every man is listening, hardly daring to draw breath. At last Hunter, rising to his knees, which are all a tremble with excitement, mutters to Sergeant Roach, who is still crouching beside him,—

"By Heaven! I believe he'll slip through without being seen."

Hardly has he spoken when far, far out to the southwest two bright flashes leap through the darkness. Before the report can reach them there comes another, not so brilliant. Then, the ringing bang, bang of two rifles, the answering crack of a revolver.

"Quick, men. *Go!*" yells Hunter, and darts headlong through the timber back to the stream. There is a sudden burst of shots and yells and soldier cheers; a

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mighty crash and sputter and thunder of hoofs up the stream-bed; a foot dash, yelling like demons, of the men at the west end in support of the mounted charge in the bed of the stream. For a minute or two the welkin rings with shouts, shots (mainly those of the startled Indians), then there is as sudden a rush back to cover, without a man or horse hurt or missing. In the excitement and darkness the Cheyennes could only fire wild, but now the night air resounds with taunts and yells and triumphant war-whoops. For full five minutes there is a jubilee over the belief that they have penned in the white soldiers after their dash for liberty. Then, little by little, the yells and taunts subside. Something has happened to create discussion in the Cheyenne camps, for the crouching soldiers can hear the liveliest kind of a pow-wow far up-stream. What does it mean? Has Ray slipped through, or—have they caught him?

Despite pain and weakness, Wayne hobbles out to where Sergeant Roach is still watching and asks for tidings.

"I can't be sure, captain; one thing's certain, the lieutenant rode like a gale. I could follow the shots a full half-mile up the valley, where they seemed to grow thicker, and then stop all of a sudden in the midst of the row that was made down here. They've either given it up and have a big party out in chase, or else they've got him. God knows which. If they've got him, there'll be a scalp-dance over there in a few minutes, curse them!" And the sergeant choked.

Wayne watched some ten minutes without avail. Nothing further was seen or heard that night to indicate

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what had happened to Ray except once. Far up the valley he saw a couple of flashes among the bluffs, so did Roach, and that gave him hope that Dandy had carried his master in safety that far at least.

He crept back to the bank and cheered the wounded with the news of what he had seen. Then another word came in ere long. An old sergeant had crawled out to the front, and could hear something of the shouting and talking of the Indians. He could understand few words only, though he had lived among the Cheyennes nearly five years. They can barely understand one another in the dark, and use incessant gesticulation to interpret their own speech; but the sergeant gathered that they were upbraiding somebody for not guarding a *coulée*, and inferred that some one had slipped past their pickets or they wouldn't be making such a row.

That the Cheyennes did not propose to let the besieged derive much comfort from their hopes was soon apparent. Out from the timber up the stream came sonorous voices shouting taunt and challenge, intermingled with the vilest expletives they had picked up from their cowboy neighbors, and all the frontier slang in the Cheyenne vocabulary.

"Hullo! sogers; come out some more times. We no shoot. Stay there: we come plenty quick. Hullo! white chief, come fight fair; soger heap 'fraid! Come, have scalp-dance plenty quick. Catch white soldier; eat him heart bime by."

"Ah, go to your grandmother, the ould witch in hell, ye musthard-sthriped convict!" sings out some irrepressible Paddy in reply, and Wayne, who is disposed to serious thoughts, would order silence, but it occurs to

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him that Mulligan's crude sallies have a tendency to keep the men lively.

"I can't believe they've got him," he whispers to the doctor. "If they had they would soon recognize him as an officer and come bawling out their triumph at bagging a chief. His watch, his shoes, his spurs, his underclothing, would all betray that he was an officer, though he hasn't a vestige of uniform. Pray God he is safe!"

Will you follow Ray and see? Curiosity is what lures the fleetest deer to death, and a more dangerous path than that which Ray has taken one rarely follows. Will you try it, reader?—just you and I? Come on, then. We'll see what our Kentucky boy "got in the draw," as he would put it.

Ray's footfall is soft as a kitten's as he creeps out upon the prairie; Dandy stepping gingerly after him, wondering but obedient. For over a hundred yards he goes, until both up- and down-stream he can almost see the faint fires of the Indians in the timber. Farther out he can hear hoof-beats and voices, so he edges along westward until he comes suddenly to a depression, a little winding "cooley" across the prairie, through which in the early spring the snows are carried off from some ravine among the bluffs. Into this he noiselessly feels his way and Dandy follows. He creeps along to his left and finds that its general course is from the south-west. He knows well that the best way to watch for objects in the darkness is to lie flat on low ground so that everything approaching may be thrown against the sky. His plainscraft tells him that by keeping in the water-course he will be less apt to be seen, but will

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surely come across some lurking Indians. That he expects. The thing is to get as far through them as possible before being seen or heard, then mount and away. After another two minutes' creeping he peers over the western bank. Now the fires up-stream can be seen in the timber, and dim, shadowy forms pass and repass. Then close at hand come voices and hoof-beats. Dandy pricks up his ears and wants to neigh, but Ray grips his nostrils like a vice, and Dandy desists. At rapid lope, within twenty yards, a party of half a dozen warriors go bounding past on their way down the valley, and no sooner have they crossed the gulley than he rises and rapidly pushes on up the dry sandy bed. Thank heaven! there are no stones. A minute more and he is crawling again, for the hoof-beats no longer drown the faint sound of Dandy's movements. A few seconds more and right in front of him, not a stone's throw away, he hears the deep tones of Indian voices in conversation. Whoever they may be they are in the "cooley" and watching the prairie. They can see nothing of him, nor he of them. Pass them in the ten-foot-wide ravine he cannot. He must go back a short distance, make a sweep to the east so as not to go between those watchers and the guiding fires, then trust to luck. Turning stealthily he brings Dandy around, leads back down the ravine for some thirty yards, then turns to his horse, pats him gently one minute, "Do your prettiest for your colors, my boy," he whispers; springs lightly, noiselessly to his back, and at cautious walk comes up on the level prairie, with the timber behind him three hundred yards away. Southward he can see the dim outline of the bluffs. Westward—once that little *arroya*

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is crossed, he knows the prairie to be level and unimpeded, fit for a race; but he needs to make a *détour* to pass the Indians guarding it, get way beyond them, cross it to the west far behind them, and then look out for stray parties. Dandy ambles lightly along, eager for fun and little appreciating the danger. Ray bends down on his neck, intent with eye and ear. He feels that he has got well out east of the Indian picket unchallenged, when suddenly voices and hoofs come bounding up the valley from below. He must cross their front, reach the ravine before them, and strike the prairie beyond. "Go, Dandy!" he mutters with gentle pressure of leg, and the sorrel bounds lightly away, circling southwestward under the guiding rein. Another minute and he is at the *arroya* and cautiously descending, then scrambling up the west bank, and then from the darkness comes savage challenge, a sputter of pony hoofs. Ray bends low and gives Dandy one vigorous prod with the spur, and with muttered prayer and clinched teeth and fists he leaps into the wildest race for his life.

Bang! bang! go two shots close behind him. Crack! goes his pistol at a dusky form closing in on his right. Then come yells, shots, the uproar of hoofs, the distant cheer and charge at camp, a breathless dash for and close along under the bluffs where his form is best concealed, a whirl to the left into the first ravine that shows itself, and despite shots and shouts and nimble ponies and vengeful foes, the Sanford colors are riding far to the front, and all the racers of the reservations cannot overhaul them.

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CHAPTER XV.

RESCUE AT DAWN.

THE short July night wears rapidly away in the high latitudes of the Northwest. It is barely dark at nine, and in six hours

> "Morn, in the white wake of the morning star,
> Comes furrowing all the Orient into gold."

Yet the night wears wearily, watchfully away in the bivouac down among the cottonwoods south of the Black Hills. Exhausted with the excitement and fatigue of the day, some few men sleep fitfully at times, and other few doze once in a while among the watchers. All the livelong night there is jubilee among the Indians above and below. They keep up their howlings and war-dances in prospective triumph, for, so far as they can learn, they have done no more damage to the soldiers than the killing of a few horses and the wounding of some half a dozen men. Their own loss has been greater than that, and there is mourning for some of the braves slain in the combat of the day. They know that escape is impossible to the soldiers. They feel that with another day they can wear out the besieged; tempt them into firing off their ammunition, and, if they can only keep off their friends, —the regiment,—they have them sure.

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All the same it is pleasing to Indian ideas of humor to keep up a delusion among the besieged of having captured their messenger. *We* know Ray is safely off, but Wayne and his men have no such comfort, for, for hours the Indians shout their taunts of "Catch white soger; eat 'um heart," and in their deep anxieties many of the men seem ready to believe it. To tell the truth, Wayne has hard work keeping up the pluck and spirits of some of the men, and towards morning the sufferings of the wounded are more than he can bear. Every little while the roystering Indians send a rattling fusillade in among the timbers, but do no great damage beyond making people uncomfortable. Some of them crawl close to the lines of sentries, but find nothing to encourage further inspection or advance. But Dana begs to be lifted in his blanket and carried some distance up-stream, where he can lie on the sand and get away from the sound of others' suffering, and Wayne and Hunter, with two or three men, bear him thither, and there, under the starlight and the waning moon, they lie at full length and softly talk over the situation. There is no disguising the truth. Their condition is most precarious: hemmed in on every side; ammunition almost gone, thanks to the reckless extravagance of the men in twelve hours' fighting, their only hope lies in Ray's reaching the —th that night and "routing out" the whole command for a dash to the rescue. They never dreamed, poor fellows, that Ray would never find the —th where they left it. All hope would have died had they known their comrades had gone.

Yet that very circumstance stands at this moment in their favor. The Cheyennes had learned with huge

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delight that the strange soldiers had marched off westward, apparently abandoning that watch near the reservations, and leaving it safe for them to scurry forth with bag and baggage, with women and children, on their rush for freedom—and Sitting Bull.

Sighting this little detachment of soldiers venturing on down the valley instead of hurrying back, they had signalled all over the country calling in war-parties to their aid, and formulated their scheme to ambuscade and "corral" it at the narrows of the valley; but Ray's vigilance and plainscraft had defeated that scheme; though they had good chances yet, if they only knew where the regiment had gone. Late the previous evening it had disappeared behind a prominent headland far up a valley farther to the south, and probably had there gone into camp for the night. Late *this* night they get the news that gives rise to vast speculation and some genuine anxiety. Runners come in who say that instead of camping there, the White Chief rode all night; turned northward soon as it was dark; crossed this very valley far above them at dawn, and where he went from there they couldn't say. They dare not follow. Was it possible the White Chief was going to beat them at their own tactics? Could it be that he was going to head them off? attack them in the early morning far to the northwest? Lying on the ground, the officers heard many hoof-beats dying away in the distance, and wondered what it might mean. It meant that some fifty of their foemen had galloped away to look for their families and the rest of the band, and warn them of the new danger. It was more than certain that no help could come to the soldiers in the

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valley; but they must guard their people against this mysterious move. At daybreak those left behind would resume the effort to dislodge the soldiers, and then there would be a revel.

And daybreak comes all too soon. Far to the east the stars are paling, and a grayish veil rises slowly from the horizon. One by one the night-lamps in the heavens lose their sparkle and radiance, as the filament of the dawn shrouds and stifles them. Far down the valley tumbling outlines of ridge and height are carved out in sharper relief against the lightening sky. There is a stir in the leaves o'erhead and the soft rustle of the morning breeze. Presently the pallid veil at the east takes on a purplish blush, that is changing every instant to a ruddier hue. Faces are beginning to be dimly visible in the groups of defenders, pinched and drawn and cold in the nipping air, and Wayne notes with a half sob how blue poor Dana's lips are. The boy's thoughts are far away. Is he wandering? Is it fever already?

His eyes are closed, and he whispered to himself but a moment ago. Hunter is taking a cat-nap. Wayne is too anxious, too unhappy to sleep, and his wound is stiff and painful. A veteran first sergeant comes creeping up to them for orders, and they are brief enough:

"Don't let the men waste a shot. It's our only hope of holding out until help can come. They'll be on us again soon as it is fairly light."

"Captain," whispers Dana, "have you been awake all the time?"

"Yes, lad. Why?"

"Have you heard nothing,—no signal?"

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"Nothing; not a sound. Why do you ask?"

"I'm afraid I've been only dreaming; yet I thought, I surely thought a while ago I heard a trumpet-call,—far away—far out on the prairie."

"Which way, Dana?"

"Off to the southwest. I didn't like to speak of it, but I thought I heard it twice."

"If Ray got through all right that's where the —th should be coming from. It may be, Dana. It may be, for they'd lose no time, though Ray thought six would be the earliest hour at which he could fetch them even at a trot. It's only about three now, or a little after. I'll put men on watch and have them listen. Go and bring the trumpeter to me," he said, to one of the men.

The light grows broader every moment. Already forms can be dimly distinguished up and down the stream-bed, and mounted Indians darting about out on the prairie. A sergeant comes up to the group of officers with quiet salute:

"Those fellows up-stream are getting ready, captain. Several of them mounted a few minutes ago and rode away rapidly towards the southwest. I saw others out on the prairie heading over to the bluffs. They seemed excited-like, and looked to be in full fighting trim."

Dana's eyes light with eager hope.

"Captain, they heard what I did. Some of our fellows *are* off there, taking short cut across country to find us, and are signalling with their trumpets. Let us go farther out,—to the prairie. I'm sure I heard it, and we can answer."

Almost broad daylight now, though it is long before

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sun-up, but in very short time Wayne, Dana, and the trumpeter are crouching just at the edge of the timber, listening, listening, while a prayer goes up with every heart-beat.

At last Dana's weakness tells upon him. He sinks down at the bottom of a tree exhausted, but his ears are still alert. Suddenly he springs again to his knee. "There! for God's sake listen. What is that?"

And far, far out to the southwest, far beyond the line of bluffs, there rises upon the still morning air soft, clear, floating, and oh! sweeter than the harmonies of seraphs, the quick, joyous notes of officer's call. Oh, heaven! was ever reveille so blessed?

"Up with you, Rheinhart! Answer them! Blow your whole soul into it, but make 'em hear!" shouts Wayne; and the burly young Prussian rolls over on his back, braces his copper clarion at his lips, and rouses the echoes of the valley with the ringing, jubilant, pealing reply. None of the dolorous business of Roland at Roncesvalles about Rheinhart's performance this time! It is like the bugle-horn of Roderick vich Alpine Dhu,—

"One blast were worth a thousand men."

From rifle-pit and stunted log, from shore to shore, the timber leaps into life and rings with the triumphant cheers of the besieged.

"Down with you, you idiots! back to your holes!" yell the officers, none too soon, for with vengeful howls every Indian in the valley seems at the instant to open fire, and once more the little command is encircled by the cordon of savage sharpshooters. Holding their

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own fire except where some rabid young foeman too daringly exposes himself, the men wait and listen. Little by little the fury of the attack draws away, and only scattering shots annoy them. They can see, though, that already many Indians are mounting and scurrying off to the north side of the valley, though plenty remain in the timber to keep vigilant watch over their every move. Hunter begs permission to mount and move out with twenty men to guide the rescuers, but there is no ammunition to warrant it. All men are needed just where they are. Scattering shots keep coming in; the yells of the Indians still continue; the trumpeter raises a lusty blast from time to time, but officers and men are again all eagerly listening.

"They're coming! they're coming!" is next the cry, for distant shots are heard, then the thunder of hoofs, the shouts and yells of excited Indians; then warrior after warrior comes darting back over the bluffs at the south, springing from his pony at the crest, as though for one more shot at rapidly-advancing foe; more shots and yells; a trumpet-blare, and then,—then ringing like clarion over the turmoil of the fight,—echoing far across the still valley, the sound of a glorious voice shouting the well-known words of command, "Left—front—into line—*gallop!*" And Dana can hold in no longer. Almost sobbing, he cries aloud,—

"Jack Truscott, by all that's glorious! I'd know the voice among a million!"

Who in the —th would not? Who in the old regiment had not leaped at its summons time and again? Who that was there will ever forget the scene,

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—the welcome those wellnigh hopeless fellows give it now? Dana's men break from their cover, and cheering madly, go dashing through the timber towards their persecutors of the day before. Hunter's skirmishers push eastward through the trees for one more crack at the besiegers. Others—cheering too, yet spell-bound—cling to the spot, and go wild with joy as the long blue line comes flashing into view across the bluffs from the south, the just rising sun flaming at their crests and tinting the wild war-bonnets of the foe, who go tumbling and scurrying away before them; and their old adjutant comes thundering down the slopes with ninety splendid troopers at his heels, sweeping the valley of their late humiliation,—riding home to the rescue.

Fired by the sight, some of Wayne's men seize their saddles and throw them on their excited steeds, but before they can mount Truscott's men are whirling up and down the valley, driving the few remaining warriors to the other side, and leaving some wounded ponies and two bedizened braves prone upon the prairie. Quickly the leader comes darting through the timber with hearty, yet laughing, greeting for Wayne, and a wave of the hand to the cheering group. There is no time for compliments now. Out go the skirmishers across the river bottom, through the trees, and spinning away across the valley northward, whirling the Cheyennes before them until they are driven to the bluffs. Then, as the "halt" is sounded, and the vigilant line forms big semicircle to ward off further attack, and the little pack-mules with their escort come ambling briskly in from the south, Jack Truscott comes quietly back, lifting his broad-brimmed

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scouting-hat and wiping the sweat from his brow; and as they throng about him—officers and men—almost the first question asked is,—

"And where is Ray?"

"Safe, but badly wounded."

And then little by little the story was told. But for Ray no rescue could have come. The regiment was miles away across country. Truscott's squadron had reached their late camp the previous evening to find them gone. There was a stockade there, where, with underground defences and stout palings, a little company of infantry stood guard over a lot of ammunition and supplies. They found there the sick and two wounded of the regiment, a doctor and some scouts who had backed out of going, and they also found a letter to Truscott from the colonel commanding, telling him that Wayne ought to be somewhere west of him up the next valley, to push on and join him, and then together they would be strong enough to ride through the Cheyenne trails and find the regiment. Fearing that Wayne would get too far up the valley, Truscott decided to make a night march due north and strike it some distance up-stream. From four P.M. until eleven they had rested, then had coffee, fed the horses, and started. Somewhere about one o'clock through the dim light of the waning moon they caught sight of a mounted man rapidly nearing them from the east, and heard the whinny of a horse. That was enough to prove 'twas no Indian. Who could it be? One or two flankers galloped to meet him, and the next thing a sergeant came rushing to Truscott at the head of column.

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"My God! captain, it's Loot'nant Ray, an' he's most dead."

In an instant Truscott had halted the command and was at the side of his old friend, whom the men had lowered, weak and faint, to the ground. The surgeon came, administered stimulant, examined and rebound his wound; a bullet had torn through the right thigh, and he had bled fearfully, but all he seemed to think of was the errand on which he came. In few words he told of Wayne's position, pointed out the shortest way, and bade them be off at once. Three men were left with him, one galloped back to the station for an ambulance and the hospital attendant there, and with his faint blessing and "good luck to you, fellows!" Ray had sent them at lively lope bound for the valley and the rescue. There were men that July morning who hid their heads to hide their tears as Truscott quietly told of Ray's heroism and suffering, his narrow escape, his imminent dangers, all met and borne that they might live. There were others who cared not if their tears were seen. There was no one there who did not vow that it would go hard with him if ever man ventured to malign Billy Ray in his presence; but there was no one there who dreamed that even while daring death to save them the man whose praise was on every lip stood bitterly in need of friends, that blackest calumny, that lowest intrigue, had conspired to pull him down.

It was a week before the four companies rejoined the —th, and the reunited regiment pushed northwestward towards the Big Horn Mountains; but by that time Ray with other wounded was being carefully wheeled back

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to Russell, where the news of his heroic exploit had preceded him, and where widely different feelings had thereby been excited. One household heard it as it will never be forgotten. Mrs. Truscott and Miss Sanford were just seating themselves at breakfast one bright morning, when Mrs. Stannard came rushing in all aglow with mingled excitement and emotion.

"Hurrah for the Sanford colors!" she cried. "Read that! I cannot,—I cannot!" And throwing them a long despatch, she astonished her next-door neighbors by fairly bursting into tears.

It was with difficulty that the ladies could recover composure in time for the inevitable visit that they knew must come from Mrs. Whaling, and *did* come at ten o'clock.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW WE HEARD THE NEWS.

SOME strange things had been happening at Russell. Among others the midnight serenade at Mrs. Truscott's had been repeated. Miss Sanford and Mrs. Truscott both heard it this time, and when Mrs. Truscott would have gone to the window to peep and see who it was who sang so delightfully, Miss Sanford restrained her, quietly saying that this was his second visit, and she knew it to be Sergeant Wolf. Mrs. Turner and other ladies, eagerly and naturally curious to find out who it was that serenaded one house in the garrison twice, and similarly honored no others, had plied Mrs. Truscott

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with questions. It was agreed that they should tell Mrs. Stannard and seek her advice, but avoid all talk with others. Such resolutions are all very well, but rather impracticable in view of the indomitable energy with which the sex will pursue a train of inquiry. It was delightfully romantic, said the ladies, delightfully sensational some of them thought, and their theory was that some one must be paying his devotions in this way to Miss Sanford, which would account for his total obliviousness to the charms of others—married and single. Mr. Gleason, when first questioned, had assumed that air of conscious negation, of confirmatory disclaimer, which is calculated to impress the hearer with the belief that, despite denial, he was deserving the soft impeachment. Gleason would gladly have assumed the responsibility. For a whole day he was the hero, to many feminine minds, of the serenades, and the recipient of a dozen warm invitations to come and sing for them that evening; but before nightfall one theory received a shock which was followed in an hour by another. The first was when Mrs. Whaling placidly asserted that she knew all about the serenades. That while the supposed unknown had honored Miss Sanford's window twice, it was getting to be an old story at the colonel's, as the troubadour had appeared under her Cecilia's window almost every night for—oh, she didn't know how long. Cecilia had blushingly confessed that morning, and she, Mrs. Whaling, had frequently heard his tinkling guitar and sweet tenor at odd times. Now, among the infantry ladies it was an older story that fair Cecilia had a way of arrogating to herself attentions never intended for her, and of having a

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fertility of invention which enabled her at a moment's notice to discount any story of devotions to another girl with exuberant descriptions of others more intense of which she was the prior object. Any statement of her sainted child was promptly backed by her adoring mother, and, well, there was disbelief, not loud but deep, of this statement among the infantry ladies. As for "ours,"—Mrs. Stannard listened in silence but with glistening eyes; Mrs. Truscott and Miss Sanford with evident relief; Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Wilkins with exclamatory interest.

The second shock came when a party of ladies, Miss Cecilia Whaling being of the number, alluded to Mr. Gleason as the probable Manrico, and this for the purpose of "drawing out" Mrs. Turner. "Nonsense!" said Mrs. Turner. "Mr. Gleason has no more voice than a frog. He thinks he can sing, but—you just ought to hear him."

"Why, but, Mrs. *Turner*," said one of the fair advocates, eager to sustain the theory she advanced, "Mr. Gleason as much as admitted that he was the man."

"He? of course he would! Mr. Gleason imagines there is no accomplishment he does not possess. If you need conviction ask him to sing."

Ah, me! And this was the same lady who so vehemently stood up for Gleason in the days when he was her devotee—before she discovered that poker had attractions for him before which her own could but "pale their ineffectual fires. *Tantæne animis cœlestibus iræ?*"

If it wasn't Gleason, then, who was it? That was what the ladies demanded to know,—Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Wilkins being as determined as their sisters of

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the infantry. It was evident all too soon that the subject annoyed and embarrassed Mrs. Truscott. She colored painfully when it was mentioned in her presence. This only whetted the zeal and inquisitiveness of the inquisitors. In one form or other it was constantly being brought up in her presence, and her every look and gesture was narrowly scanned. Mrs. Turner grew wild with curiosity. Here was a mystery indeed! From Mrs. Stannard she could extract nothing. From Miss Sanford she received smiling, gracious treatment at all times, but nothing tangible in the way of information. She almost made up her mind to be gracious to Mr. Gleason, to be enticing, in fact; but before her wiles could take effect other developments had rendered that course impracticable.

Gleason himself, as we have seen, had taken prompt measures to satisfy himself as to the identity of the serenader. His next step was to institute inquiries as to just what was meant by these demonstrations on part of the sergeant. Insidious questions were propounded to Mrs. Stannard, Mrs. Truscott, and Miss Sanford, only to mystify him the more. They would say nothing to enlighten him; but he plainly saw that each one of the three was conscious that Wolf was the midnight visitor, and that two of the three were in possession of knowledge with regard to the mysterious soldier which he could not fathom. He took to studying Wolf; sent for him frequently; had long talks with him ostensibly as to his duties with recruits, but began to "draw him out" as to his past. All he could learn was that he had come to this country determined to enlist, had served a few months with Truscott at the Point, and had secured

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a transfer because he wanted active service. He declined to tell what had been his connections or his life before coming to our shores, but he was evidently a man of education and refinement; he was an admirable horseman, swordsman, and drill-master; he had evidently been trained for the military profession. Now, how was it that he had so readily acceded to the detail which kept him on duty at Russell, when, if he so wanted active service, he could have been sent with the regiment? Gleason's one interpretation of that was that the sergeant "loved, alas, above his station." It behooved him now to find out which of the ladies at Truscott's had inspired this romantic passion. It occurred to him that the discovery might be made very useful. He was plainly losing ground there. Invitations to tea and dinner had not been forthcoming since Truscott's squadron marched away, and his efforts to see Miss Sanford alone had been frustrated. Having secured the detail which kept him at the post while the regiment was out roughing it, he relaxed the assiduity of his attentions to Mrs. Whaling, but kept up his hand with the old colonel through the medium of pool and billiards, though he lost less frequently. He was always having confidential chats with the colonel, and when Captain Buxton came through on his way to catch the regiment, three days after Ray's departure, Gleason took him to see the colonel, and the three were closeted for some time together. It worried Mrs. Stannard, who felt sure there was mischief brewing, and she so wrote to the major, who tackled Buxton the moment he joined with questions about Ray, and Buxton was dumb as Sam Weller's drum with a hole in it. Ray

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was there and "chipper" as a cricket. Everybody noted how blithe, buoyant, and energetic he was, but this very trait prevented Stannard's having more than one talk with him before the separation of Wayne's command from the regiment. Ray was off on scouts from morn till night. Stannard frankly told him how worried he had been, and Ray looked amazed, declaring he had never been more temperate, and that his accounts were straight as a string. He had played billiards but had not touched a card.

When told of the allegation that he had been incessantly with Rallston, and had cut loose from Buxton and Gleason, Ray replied that it was incomprehensible to him how any man who knew Buxton and Gleason could blame him for that. He never spoke to Gleason, and as the two were always together, he had no wish to embarrass their good times. He was with Rallston, his brother-in-law, who had been most kind, hospitable, and jolly; but Ray went on to say he found that Rallston tried to be sharp in palming off some inferior horses upon them, and he had blocked it. This had caused a "split," so to speak, but nothing of consequence, as he had immediately started to rejoin. More than this there was no time to talk of. Ray went with Wayne, Stannard with the —th, and they saw nothing more of each other for many a long day. Meantime, Gleason was getting in his work. Stannard had written briefly to his wife to tell her what Ray had said, but she was a keen judge of character, and she could not but note the reticence and evident embarrassment of the young adjutant at Russell—a courteous and high-minded fellow—whenever she mentioned Ray's name.

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Failing in his effort to extract information from Sergeant Wolf, Gleason changed his methods. He began worrying him, restricting his movements in various ways, and hampering him with corrections and suggestions. One day a bandsman, who was excellent as a clarionet- and violin-player, took his discharge-papers on expiration of term of service, and the bandmaster appeared at the adjutant's office with Sergeant Wolf to announce that the sergeant was even a better musician than the discharged man, and was desirous of giving up his "lance" rank and entering the band. Colonel Whaling and his adjutant were delighted to make a temporary transfer to meet the case and to write to Mr. Billings for regimental sanction. All too late, Gleason heard of and tried to stop it. It took Wolf out of his control and compelled him to resort to watching him. He had so palpably given it to be understood that *he* was the sweet singer who had entranced the garrison in his midnight serenades that Gleason now felt he could not go to the adjutant and tell him that Wolf was the man, and that he must pen him up at night. Indeed, he rather wanted to have more of the serenading. He sniffed a scandal, and in his resentment at Mrs. Truscott's evident avoidance of him and Miss Sanford's serene indifference, he was beginning to feel that he could welcome anything that would besmirch their names or cloud their domestic peace. From his soldier servant he learned that Wolf spent hours in writing letters, most of which he burned or tore up; that he held himself aloof from the bandsmen, and was trying to get a little room to himself. Every night when he was officer of the day, and occa-

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sionally when he was not, Gleason patrolled that back fence in search of Wolf, and one night he was rewarded. He sprang suddenly from his hiding-place, and the soldier turned and ran like a deer, distancing Gleason in no time; but in his flight he had dropped a letter. Gleason could hardly believe his eyes when he saw it lying there upon the ground. It bore no superscription, but in three minutes the lieutenant had rushed to his quarters, locked the doors, and shut himself up with his prize. The family next door was startled by the shout of triumph and delight with which he read the last lines. He almost kissed the letter in his ecstasy. He hardly slept that night from excitement, and it was the very next morning that Russell was electrified by the telegraphic news that the —th had had sharp fighting; that the main body of the regiment, early in the morning three days previous, had met and driven back to the reservation a large force of Cheyennes seeking to join Sitting Bull; that Captain Wayne's squadron had been surrounded and cut off by others of the same tribe, and rescued by Truscott's squadron at the same instant that the fight was going on at the War Bonnet; that Wayne's people would undoubtedly have been massacred to a man—as their ammunition was spent—but for the heroism of Ray, who had run the gauntlet through the Cheyennes all alone in the darkness, found Truscott's squadron going rapidly away in another direction, turned him to the rescue just in the nick of time, and now, weak and wounded, was being sent in to Russell; that there had been several men killed, quite a number wounded, and that among these latter were Blake, Wayne, and Dana; and that Blake, too,

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would be sent to Russell. Further particulars came every hour or two. Every report had something additional to say of Ray's valor, and though he ground his teeth in rage at the thought of Ray's temporary exaltation, Gleason was philosopher enough to know that no man was long a hero in garrison life, and so took advantage of the excitement to go and besiege the ladies with congratulations. How could they exclude him at such a time? Grace was in an ecstasy of pride and joy over her Jack's splendid charge, and Marion Sanford, who gloried in deeds of valor, sat wondering if it were really true that she knew the man whose name was on every lip, gallant, daring Ray,—that—that even then, as Truscott wired them, he never forgot he was riding for her colors.

But it was delicious to hear Gleason: "I cannot rejoice too much, ladies, that it was the troop *I* so long commanded that made the decisive charge. They have fulfilled my highest expectations," was an oft repeated remark. And when Mrs. Whaling came the second time to dispense tearful felicitations, she found him ready to say amen to her pious suggestions that they should unite in praise and prayer to the Throne of Mercy.

The man was indeed

> "A rogue in grain,
> Veneered with sanctimonious theory."

They—Grace and Marion—had early fled to their rooms and knelt in overwhelming gratitude to thank the God they worshipped for the mercy vouchsafed to

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those so near to them. He—the two-faced villain—held in his pocket at that moment the letter with which he meant to crush the woman who had dared to hold him aloof.

As yet, however, he had no intention of immediately using it. For the time being, the general rejoicing among the ladies made it possible for even a shirk like Gleason to be among them a good deal. They could talk of nothing but how splendid it was to be with the regiment, and how admirably this or that officer had behaved, and one would suppose that such conversation would have been galling to an able-bodied listener; but that pachydermatous quality, to which allusion has been made, stood Gleason in good stead. He smiled serenely at all their shafts, and spoke of the deeds of the regiment quite as though he had been an active participant. He hung around Truscott's quarters a good deal, bringing all manner of trivial items of news from time to time, and even manufacturing them that he might have an excuse to see the ladies. He was so constantly there on pretext after pretext that he overdid the matter,—annoyed both the ladies by his persistency and his covert allusions to Wolf and occasional flings at Ray. They begged Mrs. Stannard to devise means to rid them of him at last; and one afternoon when he appeared at the door and walked past the servant into the hall, as was his custom, the maid had twice to repeat,—

"The ladies beg to be excused," before he would hear it.

"Say to Mrs. Truscott, with my compliments, that I have some further news of the regiment," he said,

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in a voice he knew would penetrate the rooms on the second floor, and it did; but Mrs. Stannard was there. He had already called and spent an hour that very morning, and the ladies had determined to check it.

"Mrs. Truscott's compliments," said the maid, smilingly, as she came tripping down the stairs. "The ladies are lying down, and would he please leave word. If it was anything important, of course Mrs. Truscott would come."

"Oh, no," said Gleason, loudly; "say I'll call this evening after retreat."

But when he came they were all on the piazza, Mrs. Stannard, too, and he knew that he could not be too careful what tidings or rumors he manufactured in her presence. Again, on the following morning, he presented himself with similar plea. This time the ladies begged to be excused.

"Will you say to Miss Sanford that I would greatly like to see her a few minutes?" he persisted. And then Miss Sanford came to head of the stairs,—no further.

"What is it, Mr. Gleason? I cannot come down," she said, very civilly, but uncompromising for all that.

"Er—I hoped you felt like—er—taking a walk or something."

"Thanks, Mr. Gleason. I am too busy to-day."

"Well, shall we say to-morrow, then?" he persevered.

"To-morrow I go riding with Mrs. Stannard."

"Do you? What time? Perhaps I can arrange to take a gallop at the same hour. You've never ridden with me yet." (Reproachfully.)

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"You will have to ask Mrs. Stannard. Now, Mr. Gleason, I must go back to my desk. Good-morning." And she vanished, sweet and smiling, and he "went off mad," swearing mad.

That very afternoon an ambulance arrived from Laramie with Ray. Oh, what a jubilee they had! and how those women fluttered around him as he sat in a low reclining-chair on the piazza of the quarters made ready for him! A young assistant surgeon was with him, whom Ray cajoled and bullied alternately; called him such military pet names as "Pills," "Squills," and "Sawbones" whenever he had occasion to address him; laughed him out of all his feeble protests against "exciting himself," and bade him reserve his ministrations for Blake, who would be in on the morrow. The evening he came, after he had been shaved and bathed and rebandaged, and had his hair trimmed, and had donned a very swell brand-new fatigue uniform, in which he looked remarkably natty and well despite a slight pallor, Ray had insisted on being trundled up the row in a wheeled chair, and there at Mrs. Stannard's they had a little rejoicing of their own,—Ray and the young surgeon being surrounded by the ladies of the —th for an hour, when Mrs. Wilkins had to go off to her brood, Mrs. Turner to visit some infantry friends, and then, awhile longer, Miss Sanford sat and listened to the eager talk of Mrs. Stannard and Grace with the dark-eyed cavalryman, and those dark eyes of his sought hers every other minute. They tried to get him to talk of his ride. Even Grace, declaring that he must, and turning laughingly to her friend, exclaimed,—"Come, Maidie, add your plea.

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You have a right to know how your colors went;" and Miss Sanford's face flamed with its sudden blush, but she spoke no word. Mrs. Stannard, smiling and happy, but seeing everything as usual, noted that Ray, too, had flushed underneath the deep tan of his frontier complexion, but he came to the rescue blithely as ever.

"Ah, Miss Sanford, it would have been easy enough if I had only had Monarchist; though Dandy did nobly, bless him!"

It was a blissful evening, and all too short, for the doctor simply ended it by wheeling Ray home at nine o'clock and putting him to bed. For two days more he was incessantly up the row in his wheeled chair. Twice Gleason saw him *tête-à-tête* with Miss Sanford on the piazza, and the garrison ladies were slyly twitting him with his prospects of being cut out. The whole garrison by this time saw that he and Ray were not on speaking terms. Blake, too, had arrived, a little cross and crabbed for him, as his wounds were painful, consisting mainly of bruises where his wounded horse had fallen and rolled with him. But he could limp about and swear, and distort the poetry of the old masters and be savage and cynical. He hated Gleason, ridiculed him in public, and hailed him as a military Malvolio.

"See how he jets 'neath his (anything but) advanced plumes!" he spouted, as Gleason came gallanting some of the garrison ladies down the line, desperately hoping to make Miss Sanford jealous. Gleason couldn't for the life of him explain what Blake meant, but he knew there was sarcasm in it, and hated him all the same. It

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would be but a few days before both the wounded officers would be able to perform light duty. There came a telegraphic inquiry as to that from way up at Fort Fetterman. The colonel wanted to know, and old Whaling was pleased to send the response. But it was a blow to Gleason. Within forty-eight hours it brought other telegraphic orders from division headquarters to send Lieutenant Gleason at once to Fort Fetterman, to join his regiment at the earliest possible moment.

There was visible rejoicing in the garrison. Gleason had a vehement interview with the post commander and galloped off to town, where he spent much time telegraphing and awaiting replies. Then, to wear off the tedium of the intervening hours, he resorted to several haunts well known to the inhabitants of those days, and did more or less betting on uncertain games, and much more wrestling with an insidious enemy. He was crazy drunk when lifted from the hack at his quarters late that night; and his orders were to take stage for Fetterman at three P.M. the following day. Captain Webb, returning from his Kansas court, would reach Cheyenne at noon and go by same conveyance. It was arranged that the two officers should be in readiness at the fort, and the coach would drive through and pick them up.

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CHAPTER XVII.

A COWARD'S DEED.

MR. RAY was hobbling about his room blithe as a lark. He had slept soundly, awaked refreshed, enjoyed his breakfast and the music of the band at guard-mounting; was rejoicing in the arrival of Dandy, who had been sent down from Laramie and was now in a little paddock in the back-yard of the quarters he and Blake occupied in company. He had spent an hour delightfully at Mrs. Truscott's, where the ladies were out taking the morning air, and finally had come home to write to "the mother" at Lexington, who, with all her pride in her boy's achievements, was still vastly worried. She had written to the commanding officer, in fact, and begged particulars from him, as her son was so averse to writing. The colonel had shown the letter to Gleason, who happened, as usual, to be on hand, and Gleason had remarked, "Well! That's what I always told you. You'll get to know him after a while." Ray had written a joyous letter to her and a few jolly lines to sister Nell, whose last letter had perplexed him somewhat, and then, his work finished, he had risen, and was limping around with the aid of a stick singing lustily the old darkey camp-meeting lines,—

"Oh, de elder's on de road, mos' done trabbelin',
De elder's on de road, mos' done trabbelin',
De elder's on de road, mos' done er trabbelin;
I'se gwine to carry my soul to de Lawd,"

when the door opened, and in came Blake.

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"What ho! Mercutio. *Your* bosom's lord sits lightly on his throne, anyhow! What you been drinking, Billy? Getting shot seems to agree with you. Faith! lad, I've had a joyous morn, chaffing Gleason and supervising his packing. What a damned sneak that fellow is, anyhow!" he broke off, in sudden disgust.

"What's he been doing now?"

"Oh!—I can't tell you; just hinting and insinuating as usual. He's no end grumpy at being sent off; seemed to think he had the inside track with the Jersey bluebell. (Look out, William, or you'll be moth to that candle next. She's the winningest thing I ever saw,—winning as four aces, i' faith!) Gad! Did you hear the K. O. W.'s* speech about her? Hullo! There they go now. She and Mrs. Stannard driving to town. Wouldn't wonder if they were going just to get rid of having to say good-by to Gleason. Come, Billy; let's limp over to the store and have a cup of sack."

"B'lieve not, Blakie, I've—well, let up on it, so to speak."

"*What?* Billy? Oh, come now, that's too—why, angels and ministers of grace! Ray, is it love? delirious, delicious, delusive love, again? Sweet William! Billy Doux! bless my throbbing heart! Odds boddikins! man,—nay, think,—

> 'Tis best to freeze on to the old love
> Till you're solid as wheat with the new.'

Don't throw off on Hebe when Shebe, maybe, only fooling thee. Peace, say you? Nay, then, I mean

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* Army *argot* for commanding officer's wife.

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no harm, sweet Will. Here's me hand on't. But for me, no dalliance with Venus,—

> 'Her and her blind boy's scandalled company
> I have forsworn.'

You have my blessing, Billy, but—

> 'Dost thou think because thou art virtuous
> There shall be no more cakes and ale?'

Avaunt! I'll hie me to metheglin and Muldoon's." And off he went, leaving Ray half vexed, half shaken with laughter.

It must have been one o'clock when, looking up the row as he sat basking in the sunshine, he saw Gleason come out of Captain Truscott's quarters and rapidly nearing him along the walk. He had been idly looking over a newspaper and thinking intently over matters which he was beginning to find vastly interesting; but something in Gleason's appearance changed Mr. Ray's expression from that of the mingled contempt and indifference with which he generally met him into one of more active interest. The big and bulky lieutenant lurched unmistakably as he walked; his face was flushed, his eyes red. He was muttering angrily to himself, and shot a quick but far from intelligent glance at Ray as he passed.

"Now, what on earth could have prompted him to go to Truscott's looking like that?" thought Ray. "I wonder if Mrs. Truscott saw him. She did not go driving."

Presently there came a little knot of ladies down the

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row. They stopped to speak to Ray, and he rose, answering with smiling welcome, and they on the sidewalk and he, leaning against one of the pillars of the low wooden portico, were in the midst of a lively chat when his own door opened and there came from within his quarters Mrs. Truscott's soldier servant, an old cavalryman whose infirmities had made him glad, long since, to exchange the functions of a trooper for those of general messenger, bootblack, and scullion on better pay and rations. He had come in from the rear. He held out a note.

"Mrs. Truscott said I was to find you at once, sir."

"Pardon me, ladies, I will see what this is," he said, opening it leisurely with pleasant anticipations of an invitation for tea. He read two lines: the color left his face. Amaze, consternation, distress, were all pictured there in an instant.

"Excuse me! I must go to Mrs. Truscott at once," he said, and went limping eagerly, rapidly up the walk.

"Why, what can she want?" asked one of the astonished ladies.

"I cannot imagine. Don't you think we—some of us ought to go and see if anything is the matter?"

"Nonsense! It is nothing where we would be of any service. What makes me wonder is what she can want of Mr. Ray; what made *him* look so startled?" (A pause.)

"Didn't Mrs. Turner say he was very attentive to her in Arizona, and that she threw him over for Captain Truscott?" (Tentatively.)

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"It wasn't that at *all!*" promptly interrupted another, with the positive conviction of womankind. "Mrs. Wilkins told me all about it, and I *know*. It was another girl Mr. Ray was in love with, and—no, it was Mrs.—somebody—Tanner, whose husband was killed, and Mrs. Truscott *did* break an engagement with somebody——"

"I didn't know about *that*. What I say is that Mr. Ray was desperately in love with Mrs. Truscott, because——"

And by this time all four were talking at once, and the thread of conversation became involved.

But Ray had hurried on. What he read had indeed startled him.

"Come to me the moment you get this. I am in fearful trouble.

"G. P. T."

He knocked at the door, and she herself opened it and led him into the parlor. She was pale as death, her eyes distended with misery, every feature quivering, every nerve trembling with fright and violent emotion. She began madly walking up and down the little room wringing her hands, shivering, gasping for breath.

"In heaven's name, what has happened?"

"Oh! I cannot tell you! I cannot tell you! It is too fearful! Oh, Mr. Ray! Mr. Ray!"

"But you must tell me, Mrs. Truscott. Try and control yourself. Is anything wrong with Jack?"

"Oh, no—no!"

"Good God! Has there been an accident? Has anything happened to Miss Sanford?"

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"No—no—no! It's only me!" she answered, hysterically inaccurate in her wild wretchedness. "I'll tell you.—It is that awful man, Mr. Gleason. He has been here and——"

Ray's face set like stone. The words came through clinched teeth now. He seized her hand—released it as suddenly.

"Tell me instantly. There's no time to lose. He goes at three."

And then at last, half sobbing, half raging with indignation, she managed to tell her story.

Gleason had come in half an hour before, and walking at once into the parlor, had sent up word that he wished to see her. She asked to be excused, but he called up that it was a matter of the utmost importance, and she came down. He closed the parlor door, stood between her and escape, and then proceeded to accuse her of slights and wrongs to him, and of interfering with his rights as a gentleman to pay his addresses to Miss Sanford,—of prejudicing her against him. He accused her husband of treating him with disdain, and then—she saw he had been drinking heavily—he with wild triumph told her she was in his power; he had long suspected her. She strove to check him and to call her servants (for a wonder they weren't at the keyhole), but she was powerless against him. Then he went on to denounce her as a faithless wife, and to accuse her of a vile correspondence with a soldier,—an enlisted man, a sergeant formerly of her husband's troop. He drew a letter from his pocket, and with sneering emphasis read it aloud. It was an ardent love-letter from Wolf, in which he raved of his love

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for her, spoke of other letters he had written, and reminded her of his happiness in past meetings, and begged to be told when he could see her alone. She was horror-stricken; indignantly denied any knowledge of him whatever. He simply sneered, and told her he meant to take that letter "to crush her husband with" the first time he asserted any authority over him, and to hold as a menace over her. Then she implored him as an officer, as a gentleman, to give it to her, but he only added sneering insult.

Ray could hardly wait till she had finished. At first he blazed with wrath, then that odd preternatural coolness and *sang-froid* seemed to steal over him. He looked at his watch—One thirty: time enough—then asked a quiet question or two. Had any one heard? Did any one else know? Not a soul. Whom could she tell? Whom could she call but him, —Mrs. Stannard and Marion being away?

"Don't worry a particle. I'll have him here on his knees if need be. You say Wolf was the signature. Do you know any—— Why! does he mean that good-looking German?"

And to his amaze she was blushing painfully.

"Yes, Mr. Ray, and he was with us at the Point, and always coming to borrow books of Jack, but indeed he never wrote me, nor I——"

"Hush! Who but a blackguard would think it? Just sit here quietly ten minutes or so. You shall have that letter. If any one comes, I think it would be best to keep quiet about this until later."

With that he went hobbling down the row. There were the ladies, and they accosted him to know if any

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thing were wrong,—if they had not better go to Mrs. Truscott? et cætera, et cætera; but he answered with unaccustomed brilliancy and mendacity that he had a scare for nothing because he could not read her fine Italian hand. She was only getting some things ready to send to Captain Truscott by the stage to Fetterman. All the same he slipped into his room, got his revolver, gave a quiet twirl to the cylinder to see that all was working smoothly, and the next minute, without knocking, banged into the front room of Gleason's quarters, finding that worthy sluicing his head and face with cold water at the washstand.

"Who's that?" he shouted, turning half round to find Ray standing less than ten feet away with a cocked six-shooter gleaming in his hand. There was dead silence a moment, then Ray's placid tones were heard,—

"Sit down, Gleason."

Gleason stood glaring at him an instant, a ghastly pallor stealing over his face, his rickety legs trembling beneath him.

"Do you hear? *Sit down!*"

And though the words were slow, deliberate, clean-cut, there was a hissing prolongation of the one sibillant that gave the impression of the 'scape-valve of some pent-up power that bore a ton to the square inch. There was a blaze, a glitter, in the dark, snapping eyes; there was a pitiless, contemptuous, murderous set to the lips and jaw; a fearful significance in the slowly-raising pistol hand and the pointing finger of the other. Limp as a wet rag, cowering like a lashed cur, terrified into speechlessness, Gleason dropped into the indicated chair.

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"If you attempt to move except at my bidding I'll shoot you like a dog. I want that letter."

"What letter?" he whimpered, in his effort to dodge.

"The letter you were blackguard enough to steal and coward enough to threaten Mrs. Truscott with. Where is it?"

"Ray, I swear I meant no harm! It was all a—a joke. I didn't dream she'd take it so seriously. I picked it up in her yard, and meant to give it——"

"Shut up! Where is it?"

"I—I haven't got it now."

"You lie! Bring it out, or I'll——" And again the rising pistol hand with dread suggestiveness supplied the ellipsis.

Gleason began fumbling in the pocket of his waistcoat. It was evident that he was on the verge of maudlin tears; he shook and trembled and began protesting.

"Bah!" said Ray. "The idea of showing a pistol to such a whelp of cowardice! Hand me the letter!" And with an impatient step forward, he stood towering over the cringing, shrinking, pitiful object in the chair. The nerveless hands presently drew forth a letter from an inner pocket. This Ray quickly seized; glanced hurriedly over it, stowed it in his blouse, then walked to the door.

Fancying him going, Gleason's drunken wits began to rally. He half rose, and with a face distorted with rage, shook his fist, and his high, reedy, querulous tenor could have been heard all over the house.

"You think you've downed me, but, by God! you'll pay for this! You'll see if in one month's time you

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don't bemoan every insult you put upon me, and if she don't wish——"

"*Silence!* you whelp, you drivelling cur! Don't you dare utter her name! Just what I'll do about this infamous business I don't know—yet. A woman's name is too sacred to be dragged into court, even to rid the service of such a foul blot as you; but, now mark me: by the God of heaven, if you ever dare bring up this matter again to a single soul, I'll kill you as I would a mad dog."

And with one long look of concentrated wrath, contempt, and menace, Ray turned his back upon his abject enemy and left him. Gleason's orderly entering the room a minute after was told to hand him a tumbler and the whiskey-bottle, and with shaking hand the big subaltern tossed off a bumper, while the man went on strapping and roping his trunks and field-kit. Half an hour afterwards, half sobered and partially restored, he was able to say a brief word of farewell to the post commander,—a venomous word.

Meantime, stopping at his quarters a moment to return his revolver and wash his hands, Ray went up the row to Truscott's. He had not time to knock. Grace was waiting for his coming with an intensity of eagerness and anxiety, and the moment she heard his step flew to the door and admitted him, leading, as before, the way to the parlor.

Mrs. Turner had, meantime, been apprised by some of her infantry friends that Mrs. Truscott had sent a note to Mr. Ray, and also that there must be something queer going on. Mr. Ray had been much agitated at first and had hurried thither, and heaven only knows

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the variety of conjectures propounded. By the time Ray was seen coming up the row again there were four ladies on Mrs. Turner's piazza, who were vehemently interested in his next move. They watched his going to Truscott's; but, of course, watching was perfectly justifiable in view of their anxiety about her.

"Did you see?" said Mrs. Turner. "He didn't even knock. She was waiting to let him in."

It was by no means an unfrequent thing for any one of the ladies of the garrison to receive a visit from some old and tried friend of hers and her husband's while the latter was in the field. Mrs. Turner never thought anything of having officers call day or evening, though, as a rule, there was a sentiment against it, and the majority of the ladies—especially the elders—thought it wrong for the young matrons to receive the visits of young officers at any time when the head of the house was far away. Now that there were only four young officers in garrison and more than a dozen ladies, the feeling had strengthened to the extent of considerable talk. It was therefore the unanimous view of the ladies on Mrs. Turner's piazza that in Mrs. Truscott's receiving two visits from Mr. Ray in one morning, under circumstances provokingly mysterious, there was something indecorous, to say the least, and unless they knew the why and the wherefore, it was their intention to so declare. "Indeed!" said Mrs. Turner, "I think Mrs. Truscott ought to be spoken to."

Utterly oblivious of this most proper and virtuous espionage, Ray had returned to Mrs. Truscott. She looked at him with imploring eyes as they entered the parlor.

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"There is the letter," he said; "do you want it or shall I burn it?"

She shrank back as though recoiling from a loathsome touch.

"Oh, no, no! Burn it! Here is a match," she cried, springing to the mantel, and then her overcharged heart gave way. She threw herself upon the sofa, burying her face in her hands, sobbing like a child with relief and exhaustion. Ray touched the match to the paper; had just fairly started the flame, when laughing voices and quick footsteps were heard on the piazza. The door flew open, and all in a burst of sunshine and balmy air, Marion Sanford, saying, "Oh, come right in. You haven't a moment to spare, and she'll be so glad to see you!" whisked into the room followed by Captain Webb.

Tableau!

CHAPTER XVIII.

DESERTION.

In that species of mental athletics known as jumping at conclusions Mrs. Turner was an expert. That she always hit the mark is something a regard for veracity will not permit us to assert. Indeed, it was not often that her intellectual subtlety enabled her to extract from outward appearances the true inwardness of the various matters that entered the orbit of her observations. All the same she was a born jumper, and,

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like the Allen revolver immortalized by Mark Twain, if she didn't always get what she went for she fetched something. Mrs. Turner could fetch a conclusion from everything she saw, and was happy in her facility. Time and again her patient lord had ventured to point a moral from her repeated mistakes of judgment, and to suggest less precipitancy in the future; but to no good purpose. Mrs. Turner's faith in the justice of her prognostications was sublime, though not unusual. It has been within the compass of our experience to meet and know undaunted women who, day after day, could, with equal positiveness, announce their theories as incontrovertible facts, or flatly contradict the assertions of those whose very position enabled them to be well informed. When Mrs. Turner was confronted with the proof of her error, and gently upbraided by the placid captain for being so positive in her affirmation or denial, that pretty matron was wont to shrug her lovely shoulders, and petulantly set aside the subject with the comprehensive excuse, "Oh, well! I didn't know."

In vain had Turner pointed out to her that the fact was self-evident, that in view of that very fact she should have been less confident in the discussion and should be more guarded in the future: his efforts were crowned with small success. Mrs. Turner's beliefs were only too apt on all occasions to be heralded by her as undeniable facts.

She saw Miss Sanford and Captain Webb enter the Truscotts' soon after Ray. She saw Captain Webb come out almost immediately and go thence to the Stannards', next door, while Ray soon appeared and walked off homeward. She saw Mrs. Stannard come

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out with Webb, and while the latter turned to come and say good-by to her, Mrs. Stannard had gone at once into the Truscotts'.

"Is Mrs. Truscott ill?" she immediately asked.

"Well—a—she seemed to be. She was evidently a good deal cut up about something," said Webb, who was slow of speech and not quick of intellect.

"Well, what do you think it was? What was she doing? Tell me, captain. I'm so worried about her, she has been so unlike herself since Mr. Truscott went away."

"Oh,—ah!—she was very pale and very—a—well, tearful, you know. Been crying, I suppose," and Webb shifted uncomfortably. He couldn't get over that picture exactly,—Mrs. Truscott springing up from the sofa all tears; Ray standing there burning a letter, all confusion. Still, he believed it something susceptible of explanation, and did not care to talk about it. But that Laramie stage would soon be along, and Mrs. Turner determined to make the best of her opportunities. Ray had never been one of her satellites, and she never forgave too little admiration, though it would be manifestly unfair to assert that she would have forgiven too much. She knew that he had been quite devoted to Mrs. Truscott in the days that succeeded the troublous times at Sandy, though the days were very brief, and now it was her impulsive theory that Mrs. Truscott's odd behavior and Ray's presence at the house were symptoms of a revival of that suspected flame. She was trying to draw Webb out when Gleason, looking black as a thunder-cloud and immensely melodramatic, came in to say good-by to her as she stood

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on the piazza. The stage came cracking in at the front gate at the moment and stopped below at Gleason's quarters, where the orderly began stowing in their light luggage.

"Have you said good-by to Miss Sanford and Mrs Truscott?" she asked, with mischievous interest.

"Er—no. I understand Mrs. Truscott is not well. I saw her this morning a moment, and promised to come round later, but I think it best not to disturb them."

The stage lumbered up to the front, and as it came Mrs. Stannard reappeared and hurried up the walk. Her usually placid face showed evidence of deep emotion and barely repressed excitement.

"Captain Webb, will you say to the major that I will have a long letter to go to him by the very next mail, and that I hope it will reach him without delay." She looked squarely at Gleason with her kind blue eyes blazing, and never so much as recognized him by a nod. "I must return to Mrs. Truscott, who is far from well, but tell Captain Truscott not to be alarmed about her. Good-by, Captain Webb. Come back to us safe and sound."

Another moment and the two officers were borne away, and Mrs. Turner went down to the Truscotts' determined to find out what was the trouble, but came away dissatisfied. There was some mystery, and she could not solve it. What did it portend that Mrs. Stannard should have cut Mr. Gleason dead?

Later that afternoon, just before sunset, there was a pretty picture in front of Truscott's quarters. It had been a lovely day, at the very end of July, but the air

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was cool and bracing, and many of the ladies, seated on the long row of piazzas, or strolling up and down the gravelled walk, had found it necessary to wear their shawls or wraps. The band was playing sweetly in the circular stand on the parade, and a dozen little children were romping about the few patches of green turf or splashing the water in the narrow *acequias*. The newly-planted sprigs of trees looked like so many tent-poles stuck up on the edge of the diamond so far as verdure was concerned, and the dingy brown of the barracks on the southern side had little that could attract the eye. But far beyond, across the creek valley, lay the rolling expanse of open prairie; far beyond that, those glistening, gleaming battlements of eternal snow standing against the Colorado skies. Only three or four officers could be seen along the row—only half a dozen soldiers in all the great garrison. The recruits were all in at supper. The officers and trained men were all far away to the north. To the delight of the children Mr. Ray's orderly came up the road leading Dandy, and after they had crowded around and petted and lauded him while a new halter was being put on, and his glistening coat touched up for the third time since his supper of oats, Dandy was slowly led on up the row, stopping every few rods to be patted and admired by the ladies, and at last reached Truscott's house, where Ray went and knocked softly, and Miss Sanford appeared. Together they walked to the gate, and there they stood. Ray expatiating on the many good points of his pet and comrade, Miss Sanford stroking the sorrel's arching neck and velvet nozzle, and looking volumes of adulation into his intelligent

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eyes. Dandy pawed and pricked up his ears, and seemed proud and conscious as any human, and would have purred like a kitten had he only known how, so soft was the touch of her caressing hand, so sweet was the praise of her gentle voice. Ray stood and watched her with delight in his eyes.

"Oh, you beauty! Oh, you dear, dear fellow! how I would prize you if you were mine! Do you dream what a hero you are, I wonder?"

Both her white hands were holding his glossy head now, and Dandy stood there looking into her animated face as though he loved every feature in it,—or was it Ray? Both of them could hardly keep their eyes off her an instant. She was a puzzle to Dandy. She was an angel to his master.

"He was hit twice, was he not?" she asked; and when he showed her the scars, she mourned over them like a mother over a baby's bumped forehead.

"I declare, Mr. Ray is growing positively handsome!" said Mrs. Stannard, looking out of the window at the pretty group. "How delighted he is that Miss Sanford should make so much of Dandy!" she added, turning to Mrs. Truscott, who lay there very white and weary looking.

Grace smiled. "I must creep up to the window and see," she said; and for a moment they gazed in silence. He was bending down over her, so bright and brave and gallant, that the next thing the two ladies looked suddenly into each other's face, smiling suggestively.

"Just what I was thinking!" said Mrs. Stannard, laughing; and there seemed no need to ask what the simultaneous thought could be. Then they looked out

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again. "Oh!" said Mrs. Truscott, impatiently, "I wish she would keep away!" for down came Mrs. Turner, all smiles and white muslin, to join them. That woman could never understand that she could be *de trop*, was Mrs. Stannard's reflection, but it was characteristic of her that she gave the (possibly) disproportioned thought no utterance. Ray lifted his cap with his customary grace and courtesy, but looked only moderately rejoiced at the coming of even so bewitching an addition to Dandy's circle of admirers. Possibly some years of experience at poker had given him such admirable control of all facial expression as to enable him to disguise the annoyance he really felt. Ray couldn't bear "humbug" in any form, and when horses were the subjects of discussion he was fiercely intolerant of the wise looks and book-inspired remarks of the would-be authorities in the regiment. To his cavalry nature the horse had an affiliation that was simply strong as a friendship. Nothing could shake Ray's conviction in the reasoning powers, the love, loyalty, gratitude, and devotion of the animal that from his babyhood he had looked upon as a companion,—almost as a confidant. He had little faith in Mrs. Turner's voluble admiration of Dandy. To use his Blue Grass vernacular, he "didn't take any stock (he called it stawk) in that sort of gush." He knew that there was only one four-legged domestic animal of which Mrs. Turner was more desperately afraid, and that was a cow. She made a ninny of herself when she went out to drive, and the mere pricking up of the horses' ears was to her mind premonitory symptom of a runaway, and excuse for immediate demand to be set down on the

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open prairie and allowed to walk home. As for riding, she couldn't be induced to try. To her a horse was a thing that kicked or bit or showed the whites of his eyes and set his ears back and switched his tail and gave other evidences of depraved moral nature, and she would no more touch or approach one than she would a wild-cat, except when in so doing, with an admiring audience, she could become the central figure in an effective tableau. Ray wished her in Jericho, as she stood at arm's length and touched Dandy with the tips of her dainty fingers and began to speak of him as "it." Equine sex was a matter beyond Mrs. Turner's consideration, and with eminent discretion she compromised on "it" as a safe descriptive.

Then old Whaling came along with his better half, and the lady stopped to see the now celebrated sorrel, and when Ray cordially addressed his post commander with the natural question, "What do you think of him, colonel?" he was genuinely surprised at the embarrassed, lifeless response. The colonel looked away as he replied,—

"Very pretty, very pretty, Mr. Ray," and then walked on as though he desired to keep aloof, and Mrs. Whaling, announcing that she was going to see poor Mrs. Muldoon, who was living outside the gate, moved on after her husband with hardly a glance for Ray.

Something strange in the colonel's manner, something constrained and distant in that of the adjutant, had occurred to him once or twice before, but he had given little thought to it. Now he felt that it could no longer be overlooked. Even Mrs. Turner, who knew that in the regiment from the colonel down almost everybody

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had a cordial word for Ray, and that now he was the idol of the hour,—even Mrs. Turner looked after the colonel in amaze and then quickly at Ray. A light flashed over her busy intellect. This was further confirmation of her theory. The colonel, too, had heard of Ray's devotions to Mrs. Truscott and was offended thereat.

But now the sunset call was sounding, the band marched away, and Ray and his fair companion stood watching Dandy, who was being led back to his paddock. A deep flush was on her cheek. She, too, had noted the colonel's cold and distant manner to Ray. She saw that he was stung by it, but was trying to give no sign so long as they were together. She had learned many things since her return from town. She and Mrs. Stannard knew all about the terrible affair of the morning, and fully understood Ray's presence at the house and Mrs. Truscott's agitation. They had recalled many of Gleason's bitter sneers and insinuations against Ray, and all three felt that, unknown to him, some covert influence was at work here at the post to do him injury, and that his loyal services this day in Mrs. Truscott's behalf had but intensified the hatred against him. It was agreed among them that not one word should be breathed of the affair, except what Mrs. Stannard should write to the major. Mrs. Truscott was sure that Jack would shoot Mr. Gleason on sight the moment he was informed, and Mrs. Stannard thought it quite probable. Miss Sanford was silent in this discussion, but all agreed that Ray must be warned that there was some plot against him. It was mysteriously whispered among the ladies about the garrison.

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Knowing this, and knowing that she could not well be the one to tell him, Marion Sanford, with her whole heart in her beautiful eyes, stood there by his side as the sun went down. She liked him for his frank, manly ways; she honored him for his loyalty; she respected him for the lack of certain traits which every one had been so careful to ascribe to him as habitual. She gloried in the daring, the self-sacrifice, the heroism of his conduct in the recent events on the campaign. She felt personal gratitude—deep and earnest—for his invaluable service to Grace—to them all—this day; and just because she could not give utterance to him of any one of these emotions, was it to be wondered at that, as he turned towards her again and caught the earnest look in her swimming eyes, Ray's heart gave one great bound?

"I want you to ride him some day, Miss Sanford. I cannot yet. Will you?" And his voice was low, and there was an odd tremor in it for Ray.

"Ride Dandy?" she said, after an instant's pause, "Mr. Ray. If he were my horse, after what he has done,—after such a deed,—do you think I would let any one use him?"

"That would rule me out, Miss Sanford," he answered, smiling.

"You?" She had clasped her hands. She was looking down nervously at the tip of her little boot. Her eyes were half suffused, her face flushing, then growing suddenly hot and cold by turns. She knew his eyes were glowing upon her. She knew there was no earthly excuse for such absurd sensations. She knew that it was highly unconventional to experience

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any such difficulty of expression where acquaintance had been so brief; but was there, after all, anything unwomanly in letting him see that she was proud of him,—of his friendship, his daring? Had not every other woman gushed over him and called him splendid and some of them "lovely," while she had never yet dared speak of it at all? He had simply laughed off their adulation; but he was not laughing now. She never saw such intensity in his face. Why! this very silence was dangerous, distracting. If she—she cared for him she could not be more nervous and shy. With sudden effort she looked up in his face.

"You? Why, Mr. Ray, I never think of one without the other. How could I tell you," she broke forth impulsively, "how simply splendid I thought you—both?"

And now, with flaming cheeks, she turned and ran into the house, leaving him all astir with delight at the gate.

And yet when he called that evening to inquire after Mrs. Truscott, and Marion, with Mrs. Stannard, received him in the parlor, she was all animation, self-possession, and mistress of the situation again. Even when Mrs. Stannard found means to leave them alone, Ray could find no pretext for diverting the talk into the delicious channel in which it flowed at sunset. Perhaps, after all, it was only the glow of departing day, like the throes of the dying dolphin lending hectic radiance to his colors, that so dazzlingly, bewilderingly, beautifully tinged the current of her words, and gave him glimpses of a heaven of hope his wildest dream had never pictured.

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But Mr. Ray had still a stern duty for that night. Having disposed of Gleason during the afternoon, he had sent for the soldier Wolf, but was told he would be on pass until tattoo. Until he had sifted the matter to the bottom he would not know how to proceed with regard to Gleason. Charges of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman, court-martial and publicity, were not to be thought of as involving her name in such a scandal. After what she had said of Wolf, his first theory—that it was all a forgery of Gleason's—was abandoned. He must see Wolf, obtain from him any similar letter he might have, clearly point out to him the madness of his conduct, and satisfy himself whether indeed Wolf might not be insane. Immediately after tattoo, therefore, he had again despatched his orderly for the bandsman, and in two minutes the latter appeared, knocked, and stood, cap in hand, within the door. Ray turned up the lamp and coolly surveyed his man. The two stood a moment confronting each other in silence. Wolf was very pale, and beads of sweat were starting on his brow, but the blue eyes never flinched. He had never served a day under the lieutenant's command, but he knew him well, as all soldiers know the various officers of their regiments: the verdict is rarely at fault. He knew there was no trifling with the man before him; he felt that no slight pretext had called him to his presence, and the instant he set eyes on him he knew his secret was in his hands.

"Wolf," said Ray, "have you written any letters to Mrs. Truscott since the one you left in her yard last week?" The question reads harshly. It was spoken

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calmly, without a vestige of menace or sneer; yet the soldier's hands clinched, as though in fierce convulsion. His forehead seemed to wrinkle into one mass of corrugations; he bowed his ghastly face in an agony of shame.

"I ask in no anger. Let me tell you briefly what has happened. I have no word to add to the reproach you feel. That letter fell into the hands of a scoundrel. He took it to Mrs. Truscott this day, and threatened her with full exposure; accused her, in fact, of corresponding with you because you mentioned other letters."

"Oh, my God! my God! Kill me, Herr Lieutenant, kill me!" was the soldier's gasping cry, and before Ray could do aught to stay him he had plunged forward on his face, and lay writhing on the painted floor, tearing wildly at his hair, calling down curses on himself, on his mad love, on the hand that penned the fatal letter, on the hound who had carried it to that innocent,—that angel. Then on his knees, with outstretched arms, he looked up at Ray, who stood utterly astounded at his paroxysm of misery and despair. "His name, lieutenant. I implore,—I demand. I *demand* his name! Sir, I am not unworthy to ask it. I was a gentleman in my country. I am a gentleman! How know you this? Where is he that has done this so foul wrong?"

"Far away by this time. Be calm now. I want the truth in this matter."

"Far away?" He sprang to his feet. "It is that devil; it is that dog Gleason! He spied upon me. It was he who found the letter. Ach Gott! Where—

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when did he dare threaten that—that angel? Where is the letter?"

"The letter is all right. He had to give it up. It was this morning he threatened her, and she is prostrate now."

For all answer he burst into a mad passion of tears. Never had Ray witnessed such self-abasement. Never had he seen such awful remorse. It was an hour, nearly, before he could calm him sufficiently to extract from him his story, and it amounted practically to this:

He had killed an opponent in a duel over cards in Dresden. There was nothing for it but to leave instantly and to seek safety in America. His rank was that of rittmeister in the hussars, and he had nothing to do but enlist in the cavalry. He was penniless and starving when he reached Truscott's quarters, and her face, bending over him as he rallied from his swoon, had haunted him day and night with its beauty, its sympathy and tenderness. She became the idol, the goddess of his life; he watched her day and night in his mad infatuation; he dreamed of her as his own; he wrote letter after letter to her as the sole means of giving vent to the wild, passionate love which had turned his brain; he destroyed them one after another; he never by word, or look, or deed, so far as he knew, let her see aught of his hopeless love. He never thought to let one of these letters fall from his hands. Yet, whenever he was alone he wrote. He had sung under her window because in his country everybody sang and played, and it was no unusual attention for any gentleman to pay the compliment of a personal serenade.

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Still he had avoided, as he thought, all recognition until the night he found Gleason creeping upon him. At mention of that name his paroxysms broke forth afresh. Never, never could he forgive himself for the fearful misery he had caused her. Never, never would he forgive the hound who had so basely dealt with her. "He shall wipe out his foul crime in his heart's blood," he swore, and Ray had to order silence. He gave Ray his word that never again would he be tempted to write a line; he implored him to ask for him her forgiveness. Never again would he cross her path. His grief broke forth afresh every few moments, and he was weak as a child. Ray became really alarmed about him, and going into the dining-room where he and Blake were accustomed to take their bachelor sustenance, he rummaged around in the dark for some brandy. Of late he had given up all use of stimulants, and Blake was down at the store. It was some minutes before he found the decanter, but when he returned the room was empty. Wolf had gone.

The next morning there was a ripple of excitement at the adjutant's office. A horse was missing from the band stables, and a musician from the band barracks. At retreat that evening it was definitely settled that Sergeant Wolf had deserted.

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CHAPTER XIX.

IN CLOSE ARREST.

To use his own language, life had suddenly become vested with new charms for Mr. Blake. He had found his conversational affinity. "For years," said he, "I have been like Pyramus, peeking and scratching at a wall for Thisbe,—only my Thisbe was never there." But Pyramus Blake had found his mate, he swore, and with huge delight he began devoting hours to chat with Mrs. Whaling.

She was old enough to be his mother, though she thought the fact was known to but few. She was as prosaic as he was fanciful, though it was her aim to appear at ease in all literary topics. She knew little or nothing of music or the languages, but it was her implicit conviction that those by whom she was surrounded knew less; and she chiefly erred in assuming to know that of which they frankly confessed their ignorance. Aside from a consummate facility for blundering in French, Mrs. Whaling possessed illimitable powers of distortion of her mother-tongue, and this it was that so fascinated and enraptured Blake on short acquaintance. He rushed in one morning to tell Mrs. Stannard that nothing but jealousy could have prompted her and the other ladies in concealing from him Mrs. Whaling's phenomenal gifts in this line, and proclaiming her the sweetest sensation of his maturer years. If we have

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failed thus far in pointing out some of the lingual peculiarities which had won for this estimable lady the title of Mrs. Malaprop, it was through the confidence we felt that so soon as she began to talk for herself our efforts would be rendered unnecessary. Overweening interest in other ladies has kept her somewhat in the background, a fact that detracts at once from all hope of ever establishing the record of being faithfully historic, since all who knew Mrs. Whaling are aware that nobody could ever keep her in the background in any assemblage wherein she was permitted to speak for herself. Perhaps it was therein that lay one of her direst misfortunes, but she knew it not, poor lady, and like too many of the rest of us, could never realize what was and what was not best for her at the time. Will the day ever come when the author of this will not realize in mournful retrospect what an ass he made of himself the twelvemonth previous? Mrs. Whaling had never studied French, but French was the language of courts and courtesy, and it sounded well, she was convinced, to introduce occasional phrase or quotation in her daily conversation, and what she meant when she used a big word in her own language was (as in the case of honest Mr. Ballou) a secret between herself and her Maker.

Mr. Blake had hobbled over to pay his respects soon after his arrival, and was noticed shaking his head and muttering to himself in perplexity at odd hours of the day thereafter. The next morning he was seen to explode, as Mrs. Whaling gravely announced among a circle of her friends that she considered Miss Sanford to be the most *soi-disant* creature she had ever met, and

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went on to explain for the benefit of those to whom her French was an impenetrable mystery,—"fascinating, or, as *they* say, seductive." But when she soon thereafter referred to the general's magnanimity in not remanding to the guard-house an inebriated soldier, who had dropped and broken a valuable lamp, because "he knew it was only a *lapsus linguæ*," Blake became her slave, and hovered about her from morn till night in hopes of further revelations. He was getting lots of fun out of life just now despite his aches and pains, and was being chaffed extensively for replacing so readily the absent and lamented Gleason,—the one thing that seemed to mar his happiness.

Mrs. Truscott had been ailing for two or three days, and the ladies were wont to stop at her door each morning to make inquiries and suggestions. Mrs. Stannard had virtually moved in next door, and was with her at all times. Mr. Ray was a frequent visitor, despite the fact that Mrs. Truscott was unable to see him (though he always asked for her), and the garrison was arriving at the not unjustifiable inference that other attractions might draw him thither. He was still too lame to walk or ride, had no duties to perform, and much time to devote to calling; but beyond leaving his card at the commanding officer's and paying a courteous visit to Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Wilkins, he made no garrison calls at all, for the hours he spent with Mrs. Stannard and Miss Sanford could hardly be so termed. He had been at the post a week, and the adjutant and quartermaster of the little command had as yet failed to drop in and welcome him as is customary. They had called on Blake when Ray was "up the row," but had not

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left their cards or inquired for his comrade. Blake thought it simply a piece of forgetfulness. Perhaps they had asked and he had forgotten; but Ray thought otherwise, and still, oddly enough, did not seem to care. He was happy in his day, and life had a new, strange, sweet interest for him that, despite his past ephemeral flames for one belle after another, was seriously influencing his life and character.

Blake wrote to his chums in the regiment that Billy Ray wasn't half the fun he used to be. "Never knew a fellow lose all his old self so quick. He has gone back on potations and poker, and it hasn't improved him a whit." There was another thing Blake growled at: Ray was mixed up in some garrison mystery, and wouldn't tell him anything about it. He had "pumped him," so to speak, because Mrs. Turner kept nagging him for information, and Ray had only colored and stumbled painfully, and finally burst forth with, "See here, Blake; something *has* happened that I accidentally got mixed up in, but it's a thing a man can't tell of, so don't ask me;" and Blake could only surmise. Then, too, there was that desertion of Wolf's,—Ray knew something about it,—and then the colonel had asked him—Blake—a point-blank question about Ray's habits which amazed him and set him to thinking. Then no mail was received from the regiment for four days, and they were all anxious; and so this bright August morning quite a party had gathered in front of Truscott's, for a little batch of letters had just arrived, and they were discussing contents and comparing notes. When Mrs. Stannard came down-stairs, blithe and breezy as ever, the ladies began their natural inquiries for Mrs.

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Truscott. She had enjoyed a good night's rest, at times at least, but had a severe nervous headache this morning. This had prompted Mrs. Turner to remark that nervous headaches were such trying things; she could never control them except by liberal use of bromides. Mrs. Wilkins was of opinion that if ever she had one she'd cut her head off before she'd use the likes—such stuff as that; lapsing very nearly into the vernacular of her early days; and Mrs. Whaling calmly announced that nothing ever did her so much good as a warm embryocation, whereat there was suppressed sensation on part of the ladies and convulsive throes by Mr. Blake. Ray and Miss Sanford, absorbed in converse on the weather, were standing apart at the doorway and heard nothing of it.

Guard-mounting was over; the band had just finished its morning programme of music and was going away, when a sudden exclamation from Mrs. Turner called all eyes to the form of the young post adjutant coming up the row.

"Why! What's Mr. Warner in full uniform for,—what can it mean?"

Full uniform had not been worn at the post for any duty since the command left for the front; guard-mounting was in "undress," as only half a dozen men were put on duty each day, and the military reader can readily understand the sensation in the group as the white plumes of the young adjutant were seen. There is only one duty which, in the absence of courts-martial and dress-parades or the like, will account for an adjutant's appearing in full uniform at such an hour, and he was coming straight toward them.

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Conversation ceased at once in the group at the gate. Ray and Miss Sanford, standing at the door-way, were still absorbed in their chat, and saw and heard nothing of what was coming. Mrs. Stannard turned pale and trembled so that all could see it. Blake looked, as he afterwards said, "six ways for Sunday;" then, as the officer neared him, with attempted jocularity sang out,—

"'The king has come to marshal us in all his armor drest,
And he has donned his snow-white plume to put us in arrest.'

Who's your victim, Warner?" and then stopped short as Warner brushed by, saying, in savage whisper,—

"Shut up! man, and get Ray away from this crowd quick. I want *him*."

Blake simply stared. Mrs. Stannard turned quickly and almost ran into the house. Mrs. Whaling lifted her eyes heavenward, as though imploring Divine mercy on the doomed one; Mrs. Turner flushed, and looked wonderingly from one to the other; Mrs. Wilkins dropped her parasol and picked it up pretty much as though it were a shillelah and she meant to use it as such, and then the group began to break up. Ray, glancing over his shoulder to inquire the cause of the sudden cessation of talk, caught sight of the snowy plume dancing on up the walk, of Blake standing in petrified and indignant silence, and then of Mrs. Stannard's face,—her eyes filling with tears. He recalled instantly her recent questions and half-uttered warnings, and something told him the blow had come. He gave one quick look at Miss Sanford; their eyes met, and hers, too, were full of trouble and something she could not express.

"Excuse me, but I want to inquire what this means,"

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he said, and, bowing quietly, he turned to the gate where Blake still stood looking after Warner, who had halted farther up the row.

"It's you, Billy boy; and damn me if I don't believe the world is mad!"

Ray stalked up the line fast as his halting gait would admit. Wonderment, indignation, bitterness, were in his heart, but he choked it all down, and his eyes were fixed full upon the staff-officer, who, seeing him alone, came rapidly back to meet him. Something of the old reckless, dauntless manner reasserted itself as they reached speaking distance. The adjutant was toying nervously with his sword-knot. Despite all Gleason's insinuations, despite official papers that had been going to and fro, he felt it impossible to believe the allegations against Mr. Ray, and his unbelief was never so pronounced as at this moment when they came together. He had never seen it done before, but instinctively—by an impulse he could not restrain—he raised his hand in salute as he spoke the brief official words,—

"Mr. Ray, you are hereby placed in close arrest, by order of Colonel Whaling."

And Ray, with courteous return of the salute, replied with almost smiling grace,—

"Very well, Mr. Warner. I presume you will give me prompt information as to the charges;" and, facing about, went slowly and deliberately to his quarters.

Mrs. Stannard stood at the door-way until she saw him turn, then, taking Miss Sanford's hand, drew her within the hall, saying simply, "Come."

"What can it mean, Mrs. Stannard? Surely he will stop and tell us."

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"He cannot, Miss Marion. He must go direct to his quarters. I will send Mr. Blake at once to him. They are going now together. I shall go and find out all I can. Do not tell Mrs. Truscott."

And without a word Marion Sanford went slowly up the stairs and to her room. Mrs. Stannard listened until she heard her close the door, then hastened down the row in pursuit of Mr. Blake. Ray waved his hand to her as he stepped inside the threshold, and Blake, fuming with fury, came back to meet her.

"Was there ever such an outrage? It is something of Gleason's doing, of course, but Ray says he can stand it if G. can, and is disposed to laugh it off; but there's something else, I'm afraid; have you heard anything?"

"Nothing but vague rumors, Mr. Blake, but enough to worry me. There is some deep-laid plot or I'm fearfully mistaken. Gleason would never dare do it alone. Can't you telegraph to the regiment and have things stopped?"

"They are far above Fetterman, and can only be reached by courier. Webb and Gleason went out with small escort last night, so the despatches say. By Jove! I'll try it. Surely the colonel and Stannard and Wayne ought to be told. Wayne is still at Laramie, but he would come. Something must be done to block these lies whatever they are."

"Oh, if Luce were only where we could make him hear! Mr. Blake, *can't* you find out from Mr. Warner what the trouble is,—what the charges are?"

"Of course I can. It is some mere local mischief that fellow Gleason has kicked up. I'll go just as soon as I've seen Billy."

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And go he did: and would have gone straight into the old colonel's office even had that veteran not called him in. And when next Mr. Blake appeared upon the walk, the light had gone out of his face. He went slowly, reluctantly, wretchedly, back down the row. He could not bear to carry the news to Ray, yet he had promised, and in his hand was a copy of the charges and specifications preferred against his friend. So far from being a mere local matter the arrest was ordered from division headquarters, the court was already selected, and the time fixed for its meeting. Long before sunset the whole garrison knew—and with what additions and exaggerations who can say?—that Lieutenant Ray was to be tried by court-martial for offences that reflected on the honor of the whole regiment, and that accepting bribes and large sums of money from prominent contractors while on the horse board, gambling with them and misappropriating public funds, were the main allegations. The charges were signed by a prominent staff-officer, and Gleason's name only appeared incidentally as a witness; so did that of Rallston, Ray's brother-in-law; but there were several others. Blake laid the bulky paper before his friend with this word,—

"Before you say aye or nay to any one of the charges in this batch of infamy, I want to say to you, Ray, that I'll stake my commission on their utter falsity."

And he had said practically the same thing to the post commander.

That afternoon Mr. Blake, after a long talk with Ray, knocked at Mrs. Stannard's door and asked to see her a moment. She came to him in dire anxiety.

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Long before this had Mrs. Whaling been in to lament over the downfall of this unhappy young man, and to expatiate on the gravity of the charges. On Mrs. Stannard's making prompt and spirited expression of her utter disbelief in them, the good lady had lifted her eyes in pathetic appeal to heaven that so mercifully enables us to bear the tribulations that befall our friends, and groaned, a veritable Stiggins in skirts. Ah, no; she hoped, she prayed, of course, it might prove false; but the general—the general said the array of witnesses was overwhelming, and then his temptations! and his past career! She had been told he was addicted to the vices of drink and cards in their worst form. Ah, no; it was futile to hope. She feared the worst. And Mrs. Stannard was wellnigh ready to bid her begone,—the old croaking raven! as down in her inmost heart she termed her. She was full of faith and loyalty, but she was fearfully worried, and Blake's coming was a godsend.

"How is he?" she asked.

"Astonished, of course; mad, not a little; but as full of pluck as ever. What I want to see you about is this. He forbids my telegraphing to have things stopped. He wants a court, wants to be tried; the quicker the better; says I can write to Stannard or anybody, but not to think of stopping proceedings. All he seems to care for is this: he fully expected to be well enough to travel in two weeks, and then he wanted to join the regiment as fast as horse could take him. All that is now impossible. He has not said a word about Gleason, but I have sent a couple of telegrams from him that will make his brother-in-law smart."

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"And have you telegraphed to Fort Fetterman? I'm sure they would have a chance to send the news."

"Yes, of course I did. What I can't get over is this: that much of this matter must have been reported through old Whaling here by Gleason, and it has all been done in the dark. The old rip never gave us a chance to refute any story that Gleason would tell. Did you hear about Ray's message to him?"

"No. When—what was it?"

"Instead of asking to see the commanding officer, as the average officer does when put in arrest for a thing he is innocent of, Ray never mentioned him. About an hour ago I met the colonel, and he asked me how Ray was behaving, and was beginning something about not letting him drink, when I could hold in no longer, and told him flatly that Ray hadn't taken as many drinks in a month as he had in a day. You ought to have seen him; he was struck all aback, and stammered something about his having been led to suppose Ray was doing a good deal of that sort of thing. I replied that that wasn't the only thing he had been misinformed about by a jugful, and he looked as though he'd like to put me in arrest too—the old slab; he would, too, if he had the grit of his wife; but he didn't. He sent Warner down just a moment ago to say that if Mr. Ray desired to speak to him about the matter he would see him this evening, as 'he desired to go to town on the morrow.' Ray begged Warner to sit down, offered him a toddy or a glass of wine, and, finally, as though it had suddenly occurred to him, exclaimed, 'Oh! Do *I* want to see the colonel? Why, really, Mr. Warner, I know of nothing that—well,

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you might say this, you know: it isn't at all necessary that *I* should see him, and I do not send this as a message; but, as the colonel appears to have furnished much of the information on these charges without reference to me, I shall probably answer them in the same way, —without reference to him.' Gad! I never saw Ray more placidly polite, and he's always most full of fight at such times."

But even with such "an old slab" as Whaling anything more impolitic than the conduct of these two cavalry subalterns could hardly have been imagined. Warner never told the colonel what Ray said; but, of course, had to say that Ray expressed no desire to see him. By the following morning the colonel was chafing over it a great deal, and over the indignation expressed around the post at Ray's arrest. He concluded that he wanted to see the young man himself, and an opportunity unexpectedly occurred. Sergeant Wolf's recent desertion was still a source of much subdued excitement, and efforts had been made to capture him. It had begun to leak around the garrison that he had been sent for the night of his departure by Lieutenant Ray, and did not return to the band barracks until eleven o'clock, "when he acted queer." The post quartermaster was much exercised about the theft of one of the best horses from the band stable, as he had become responsible for them in the absence of Mr. Billings. Possibly Ray could throw some light on the matter, and, to that officer's surprise, he was sent for at guard-mounting. His first idea was that his remarks to Warner had been carried to the colonel, and that he was to be overhauled for them. His head was perhaps

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a trifle higher than usual, therefore, when he entered the office. The first question sent the blood surging to his forehead, and he almost staggered with surprise.

"Mr. Ray," said the colonel, abruptly, "do you know anything of the causes of Wolf's desertion?"

It was a moment before he could reply. Know? Of course he knew; but it was a thing to be sacredly guarded. He *could* not tell of that interview without betraying *her*, without bringing Grace Truscott's name into the very snare that Gleason had laid for it. The colonel saw his hesitation, and wheeled around in his chair; Mr. Warner looked up in surprise.

"I say, do you know anything of Wolf's desertion,—of its causes, of where he has probably gone?" repeated the colonel, sharply.

"I do not know where he has gone, sir; I have formed an opinion as to the cause of his desertion."

"And what is it, Mr. Ray?"

"If it concerned me, I would answer unhesitatingly, Colonel Whaling. As it is, I cannot."

"What possible reason can there be for silence, sir? I do not understand."

"I cannot explain it now, sir. Let me simply assure you that I never saw him until within the last few days, that I had an interview with him the night of his desertion, and that he has had some trouble of a personal and private nature. Other than that I can give no account of him."

"This is most extraordinary, Mr. Ray. How came you to know anything of his private history, sir?"

"I decline to say, sir."

"By heavens, Mr. Ray! Do you realize that in

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addition to the other charges against you, you are laying yourself open to those of abetting desertion?"

"Possibly, sir. If so, I can meet them before the proper tribunal."

"You may go, sir. Stop! one moment: I have telegraphed to Sidney, to Denver, and to Laramie City to be on the lookout for him. I demand to know whether you have an idea where he has gone; *that* you can answer!"

"I have not, colonel."

"Do you think of any place I have not mentioned where he would be apt to go?"

Ray turned whiter now, but his eyes were unflinching.

"I do; but it is only conjecture."

"What place, sir?"

"Fort Fetterman."

"Fort Fetterman? That's simply absurd! He would be recognized there with his horse and surely arrested."

"Very well, sir; then I know of no other."

"And you still refuse to tell what your interview was about?"

"I shall always refuse that, sir." And therewith Mr. Ray was remanded to his quarters. Verily there was some reason for Blake's outburst when he came in after hearing Warner's brief description of the official interview which Mrs. Whaling had given in lurid exaggeration to the garrison.

"Why, hell is empty, and all the devils are here."

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CHAPTER XX.

A CORNERED RAT.

FAR away to the northwest this night, close under the shoulders of the Big Horn Mountains, a regiment of cavalry has gone into bivouac after a day's march through blistering sun-glare and alkali. Hour after hour, with strained, aching eyes, they have been watching the gradually-nearing dome of Cloud Peak, still glistening white though this is August. Around the blunt elbow of the mountains, two days' march away to the north, they expect to find the Gray Fox and all his men eagerly awaiting their coming. A courier from the front has brought them tidings that the Indians are in force all over the country west of the Cheetish group. Another courier has galloped after them from Fetterman, leaving there last night, and he brings strange news.

During the long, dusty, burning day Captain Webb and Mr. Gleason have joined the command and reported for duty. To the disgust of the young second lieutenant commanding Wayne's troop in his absence, the colonel directs Mr. Gleason, the senior lieutenant now for duty, to assume command of it for the campaign. Captain Truscott has no objections. He prefers not to have Mr. Gleason with his own troop, and Stannard is glad to get him out of his battalion. Very few men are glad to see Gleason, though nearly all the

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officers go to him for letters and news. They bring a small packet of mail, and on the way Gleason has made himself very interesting to Webb, and has easily gathered from that simple-minded gentleman that there was an awkward tableau at Truscott's when he went there to say good-by. "Confidentially," Gleason had let him understand that he had seen only one of many symptoms that had given much food for talk at Russell; that to his, Gleason's, bitter regret he feared Mrs. Truscott had not been as discreet as she should with a fellow like Ray, who was—well—had Webb heard anything of that horse board business, etc.? It was so easy,—it *is* so easy,—more's the pity, to say so very much in saying very little, when the good name of man or woman is at stake. Long before they got to the regiment Webb was convinced that he had seen very much more than he really did at Russell, and he had heard a volume of gossip that, after all, he could not have asserted was told him by Gleason, yet had been most deftly suggested. Gleason was deep. He knew that they brought with them the mail of the last stage reaching Fetterman for three days. Further news would not be apt to come by letter for a week, by which time the regiment would probably be hotly engaged, and he himself called back by telegraphic order as an important witness before the court. This latter probability he mentioned to no one. He meant to be grievously surprised and disgusted when the orders came recalling him, and until then his cards had to be carefully played. None of the ladies at Russell who knew him at all had intrusted him with letters. All theirs had gone by mail or by Captain Webb, but when

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the mail was opened at Fetterman, Gleason promptly offered to carry forward anything there might be for the officers of his regiment, and on the way this was carefully assorted. He had met Stannard and Truscott with beaming cordiality, saying, "Ah! you well knew I would not come without letters from *your* better halves," and fumbling in inner pockets as though they had been stored there ever since leaving Russell.

It was not until late that afternoon that Major Stannard received from Webb the message sent by his good wife, and he was pondering in his mind what it could mean, when at sunset Truscott strolled over from his troop to see him. Gleason by this time was being very sociable with the colonel and Mr. Billings.

"Have you anything from Mrs. Stannard later than the letter you spoke of this afternoon, major?" asked the captain, whose face was somewhat anxious.

"Why, yes, Truscott; Webb brought me a message that he said Mrs. Stannard gave him at the last moment, to the effect that she would have a long letter for me by next mail, and to be sure and get it. It seems a little odd."

"My last is a pencilled note from Mrs. Truscott, written but a few moments before the stage started. She says she sends it out to Fetterman by the driver, and I suppose our old 'striker' easily got him to take it; but she speaks of being far from well, nervous, etc., and that Mrs. Stannard is such a blessing to her,—so constantly with her. I wish there were something more definite. She writes three pages for the purpose of telling me not to be anxious, and the very nervousness and tremulous style give me some cause for worry."

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"Why, in my letter Mrs. Stannard speaks of Mrs. Truscott as being so bright and well, and of their having such good times together, and being so charmed with Miss Sanford. It hardly seems there could have been so sudden a change in one day."

But there had been, as we know, and a change as sudden was coming to the current of events in the harmonious —th. Just after dark a courier on jaded horse came riding in from the south. He brought telegraphic despatches to the colonel and one to Major Stannard. The latter read his by the light of his camp-lantern, gave a long whistle of amaze and disgust, and sung out for Truscott as he rolled from under his blankets. The trumpets were just sounding tattoo, and Stannard and other officers had turned in early, preparatory to the start at four in the morning. While waiting for Truscott's coming, the major could see that at the colonel's tent there was also excitement and a gathering of several officers. He had not long to wait. Truscott joined him in a few moments.

"I called you here because it was where we could talk unobserved. What do you say to that?" And he handed him the despatch.

Truscott read without a word, and then stood there a moment earnestly thinking, his lips firmly set, a dark shadow settling on his forehead. The message was as follows:

"Ray arrested. Horse board charges cooked up here by Gleason. Court ordered from Chicago. All staff or infantry officers. Make Gleason name authorities before regiment.

"BLAKE."

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Stannard had thrust his head forward and his hands into his breeches-pockets.

"Now, isn't that simply damnable?" he asked.

"You do not believe Ray guilty, do you?" was Truscott's response.

"No, I don't," though there was hesitating accent on the don't. Stannard hated to be thought unprepared for any trait in a fellow-man—good or bad. "What can the charges be? Ray told me he had neither gambled nor drank."

"Something has been received at the colonel's. Billings was there opening and reading despatches when you called me." And Truscott nodded thither.

"Come on. I'm going to see this thing through now," said Stannard, and together they walked to headquarters.

The colonel, wrapped in his overcoat, was sitting up at the head of his camp-bed noting with a pencil a few memoranda, while Billings was reading aloud in a low voice some long despatches. Outside the tent were grouped half a dozen officers, waiting for such news as the colonel might give. Beyond them were the scattered and smouldering fires, the rude shelter-tents of the men, the white tops of the army wagons; beyond these the dark outlines of the massive hills; above them all the brilliant, placid stars; around them the hush of nature, broken only by the drowsing swish and plash of rapid, running waters, the stir of the night wind in the scattered trees, the stamp and snort of some startled troop-horse, the distant challenge of the night sentries. Something important had come, and the group looked eagerly at Stannard and Truscott as they approached.

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"Have you heard anything?" was the question.

"I've got a despatch," said Stannard, gruffly; "but I want to see the colonel before I speak of it." Then the colonel's voice was heard,—

"That you, Stannard? Come in here."

And the major passed into the tent. Presently he came out, took Truscott by the arm and led him away.

"No use talking to him to-night. He has nothing but the official despatches, and they look ugly for Ray. There are other things that occupy him now, but what we want is to see Gleason right off. He is ordered to return at once, and goes back in the morning. Come."

Over in the second battalion a sentry pointed out Gleason's tent. Stannard scratched and rattled at the flap. No answer. "Gleason!" he called. No reply. "He's shamming sleep, by gad!" growled the major, between his teeth. "It's only fifteen minutes since Billings told him he was to start back at daybreak. He wants to avoid us, and has his flaps all tied inside. I'll have him out or bring his damned tent down about his ears." And it was plain that Stannard was getting excited. An officer came through the gloom. It was Captain Webb.

"Isn't this Gleason's tent?" called the major.

"Certainly. I left him there not half an hour ago," replied the captain. "Wake him up. He's got to go back in the morning."

"Yes, sir. And that's just what I want to see him about. Hullo! you there! *Gleason!*"

There came from within a snort, as of one suddenly awakened, a sleepy yawn, an imbecile "Oh—ah—er—who is it?"

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"It's me,—Stannard; and I want you," was the reply, all the more forcible for being ungrammatic.

"Oh! One minute, major, and I'll be with you," called the inmate, as though overcome with sudden access of joy, and presently he appeared, half dressed.

"See here, Gleason, Captain Truscott and I have come to inquire what you know of the charges against Mr. Ray. You are to go back at once, I'm told, as witness against him. There won't be a soul there of his regiment or his friends, for we know well you're not one, to speak for him. By thunder! what have you against him?"

"I do not think this a matter on which I should speak at all, Major Stannard, except to proper authority. The court will hear the evidence in due season."

"Well, I mean to hear something *now*, Mr. Gleason, or, by the eternal! I'll wake up the whole command to put the question. What you make one believe is, that you are seeking to ruin Ray by getting him at a disadvantage with all his friends away. Captain Truscott, what do you say?"

And then Truscott spoke. As usual, he was master of himself and showed no vestige of temper.

"The matter is very simple, Mr. Gleason. You are believed to be the accuser of Mr. Ray at a moment when it is certain the regiment is going to be so far away that its officers cannot be present at the court,—may not even be able to communicate with it. If you decline to indicate what you know to Major Stannard and me, who are his friends, the immediate protest of the regiment against your conduct must go to headquarters with the request that the court be held until

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we can appear before it. More than that, in two days we will reach the general commanding the department. Do you fancy he will permit Mr. Ray, of all others, to be brought to trial without a friend to appear for him?"

Gleason saw he was cornered. What he hoped, what he expected, was to make his escape and get back before any one learned of the charges. That hope was frustrated. In his wrath and perplexity he resorted to the invariable device of the cowardly and the low. He must divert their sympathy for Ray into distrust of him, and before he had fully considered his words they were spoken,—crafty, insidious, and calumniatory.

"Captain Truscott, *you* have spoken without threatening me, and I'll answer you. All this time I've been striving *not* to see, not to know Mr. Ray's offences; but I was on the horse board. You were not. Ask Captain Buxton to-morrow who and what Ray's associates were; but let me say to you right here that I can no longer submit to seeing you deceived. You call Ray your friend. No man can be a worse friend than he who sets a whole garrison talking about an absent comrade's wife and the notes she writes him, and who is discovered alone with her,—she in tears, he burning a letter. Webb witnessed it. Ask him."

The last words were spoken with utmost haste, with upraised hand, with trembling lips, for both Truscott and Stannard almost savagely sprang towards him as though to cram the words down his throat. For an instant Truscott stood glaring at him, not daring to speak until he could resume his self-command; but in that instant poor, perturbed Webb broke into speech.

"Oh, come now, Gleason, that's all an outrageous

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way of putting it, you know. Of course I saw there was some little trouble. Mrs. Truscott had written to Ray because she was all upset about something; she was crying, you know, and Ray might have just happened in——"

"Never mind, Webb. Don't speak a word; of course it is all easily explained. No man on earth is more welcome at my home than Ray, and my wife is one of his warmest friends. What I have to say is to you," said Truscott, turning fully upon his subaltern. "If I needed one further proof to assure me that you were the lowest and most intriguing scoundrel that walks the earth, you have given it this night. Gentlemen, you are witness to my words." And with that he walked away.

"And *I* say, Mr. Gleason, that if ever I lose a chance of showing you up in your true colors before this regiment, may the Lord forgive me! We're booked for the campaign now; but if you don't appear before that court with credentials that would damn even an Indian agent it won't be the fault of the —th Cavalry: and I mean to start about it to-night."

And he did. Old Stannard had a stormy interview with the colonel forthwith, and stirred up Bucketts, the quartermaster, and Raymond and Turner and Merrill among the captains, and even thought of rousing Canker, but concluded not to; and they raked out their pencils, and when the escort started back next morning with Mr. Gleason, the sergeant was intrusted with a batch of letters to various staff-officers setting forth in unequivocal terms Gleason's reputation as opposed to Ray's brilliant and gallant, if somewhat reckless, record.

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Even the colonel, inspired by Stannard's fiery eloquence, sent a few lines to the general commanding the division, expressing the desire in the regiment that there should be a suspension of proceedings against Ray until they could get in from the campaign. Even Billings turned to at Stannard's urging, and wrote personally to Ray and to the officer who was named as judge-advocate of the court, and everybody felt glad to be rid of Gleason as he rode homeward in gloomy silence. Everybody felt that he would be powerless for harm, little dreaming how ineffectual those letters would be as far as the present case against Ray was concerned; little dreaming how his going was but the means of coiling still more closely the folds of suspicion and dishonor around the gallant comrade whom all so gloried in for his summer's work; little dreaming of the days of doubt and darkness and tragedy that were to envelop those they left behind at Russell; little dreaming that from them and from friends at home there was coming utter isolation,—that before them lay days and weeks of toil and danger and privation, of stirring fight, of drooping spirits, of hunger, weakness, ay, starvation, wounds, and lonely death; little dreaming that when next they reached a point where news from home could come to them one-half their gallant horses would be gone, broken down, starved, or shot to death; many of their own number would have fallen by the way, and that of the bold, warlike array that rode buoyantly in among the welcoming comrades in the camp of the Gray Fox, only a gaunt, haggard, tattered, unkempt shadow would remain, when, eight long weeks thereafter, there came to them the next sad news of Ray.

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CHAPTER XXI.

RAY'S TROUBLES.

"HERE we are, Billy! Whoop! What did I tell you? Official communications disrupt bad grammar. The chief sends back your letter. Wants it changed again, I suppose. It's the old, old story,—

'You can and you can't,
You will and you won't;
You'll be damned if you do,
You'll be damned if you don't.'"

Ray took the paper with a hand that was hot and flushed. For a week he had been in close confinement, and that and a complication of annoyances and worries had combined to make him fretful; then some grave anxieties were added to his troubles; and then, his quick, impetuous nature had done the rest. He had no cool-headed adviser in Blake, who had taken up the fight with him, and now he was involved in an official tussle with the post authorities that added greatly to his fevered condition. He was sore in body, for the wound in his thigh was now beginning to trouble him again. He was sore at heart, for, except the impolitic Blake, he did not seem to have a friend in the world. There had come one or two kind little notes from the ladies "up the row," as they called the Stan-

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nard-Truscott household when they did not care to be more explicit; but these had ceased, and what was worse, in his days of worry and trouble and heartsickness, Ray had sought comfort in an old solace, that had done no great harm when he was living his vigorous out-of-door life, but was playing the mischief with his judgment and general condition now that he was penned up in the narrow limits of his quarters. Very, very anxious had Mrs. Stannard's face become; very wistful and anxious, too, was Miss Sanford's; and very sympathetic was Mrs. Truscott's. The first few days of his arrest they used to stroll down the line, and make it a point to go there and chat with him on his piazza; and this exasperated old Whaling, who was indignant that the cavalry ladies should make a martyr of their regimental culprit. The third day of his arrest, they were all seated there on the piazza, while Ray sat at his open window, and Hogan, his orderly, had led Dandy around to the front, and the pretty sorrel—the light of his master's eyes until eclipsed by one before which even Dandy's paled its ineffectual fire—was cropping the juicy herbage in the little grass plat in front of the piazza and being fed with loaf-sugar by delicate hands. Blake was sprawled over the railing, limp and long-legged, chatting with Mrs. Truscott. Miss Sanford was seated nearer the window, where Ray's eager eyes seemed to chain her, and Mrs. Stannard was doing most of the talk, for they seemed strangely silent. It was a pleasant picture of loyalty and *esprit de corps*, thought Mr. Warner, as he came down from the office; but to old Whaling, coming home crabbed from the store, where his post quartermaster had beaten him several

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games of pool, it was a galling sight. The ladies bowed in quiet, modified courtesy,—there was no cordiality whatever in it. Blake straightened up and saluted his superior in a purely perfunctory style that had nothing of deference and little of respect in it, and the colonel and his quartermaster both raised their caps in evident embarrassment. They looked back at Dandy after they had passed on a few rods, and Blake muttered,—

"Now, Billy boy, they'll be sending you a note to keep your horse out of your front yard hereafter." But Blake had undershot the mark.

That evening there came bad news. Rallston had been named as one of the principal witnesses, and Ray had telegraphed and written to his sister at Omaha asking where he was. His letter explained the situation he was in, and, though he would say nothing to accuse her husband, he told her that one of the allegations was that he had accepted five hundred dollars from him as a bribe to induce him to "pass" certain horses. The facts were these: Rallston had been among the first to welcome him to Kansas City, had taken him to his own rooms, had been most cordial and kind, had brought all manner of loving inquiries from sister Nell, and an invitation from her to visit them at Omaha before his return. Ray did not and would not drink anything beyond a little wine at dinner, nor could he be induced to touch a card at play, though every evening some of Rallston's friends were there playing poker, and Ray was a laughing and interested spectator. In the course of two or three days Rallston had grown very confidential, and had finally, most gracefully, told

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Ray that he had disliked to mention it until he felt he knew him well, but that Nelly had told him her brother had some outstanding debts; he owed money to several different parties and it worried him; they were dunning him all at the same time, and he could only meet their claims successively. "Now," said Rallston, "why not let me be your banker? Let me hand you the amount you owe these fellows. Pay 'em off at once, and then you're a free man. You can repay me when you choose, and if you never do, why, it's all right—it's Nell's present to you. I've got several thousand dollars in the bank this moment that I've no use for;" and Ray had thanked him from the bottom of his heart and accepted. Later there began to grow a breach. Rallston had quickly seen how keen an eye Ray had for defects in horseflesh, and had striven to get him to accept some horses he knew to be "off color." Ray had firmly refused. Then, later, he asked Ray to sign an I. O. U. for the five hundred dollars, which was done, and the next thing he noticed Rallston was consorting with Gleason; and when the board adjourned there was no Rallston to say good-by. Ray went to Omaha and saw his sister, who was rejoiced to hear how generously her husband had behaved, but Ray was a trifle worried then at her repeated questions about him, though Nell was brave and buoyant as ever. She was living at the hotel until his return, and he did not return up to the time Ray left for the regiment. Ray had written to him and received no reply. Now he had written to her asking where he was, and then she broke down and told him. She had not seen her husband for a month, and had only an occasional line. She needed money at that

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moment and knew not where to find him. She thanked God they had no children.

This was one letter to cause Ray bitter anxiety. Another came that he read with infinite surprise, turned over the enclosure in his hand, rose and looked through his bureau-drawer, and then, with a long whistle of consternation and perplexity, shoved the note and enclosure into his pocket.

All that night he was restless and feverish. The next morning brought a new trouble. Once let a fellow get in arrest and all the buzzing contents of Pandora's box will be turned loose upon his unlucky head. He had risen late, could eat no breakfast, and his wound was troubling him. There came a knock at the door, and the orderly with the commanding officer's compliments,—"Was that horse of the lieutenant's private or public property?"

"Why, public, of course," said Ray; "but say to the colonel that each officer of the —th Cavalry has been allowed to use one horse for campaign purposes to be considered as his own."

Blake had gone off somewhere. It was too early for the ladies. Ray fretted and worried, wondering what this new move could portend, when he heard a row in the back-yard; and in came Hogan, full of fight and wrath.

"There's a doughboy sergeant out there, sir, as says he's ordered to take Dandy to the quartermaster's stables, an' I told him to go to blazes, an' whin he shtepped by me an' into the paddock an' began untyin' him, I told him he had a right to shpake to you furrst, an' he said he'd slap me into the gyard-house if

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I gave him any lip, and I turned the kay on him, sir, an' here it is. I locked 'em both in, sir. Shure they couldn't take the lootenant's horse without his knowin' it, sir."

Ray took the key and hobbled out to his back door, simply telling Hogan to come with him. He was thunderstruck at the idea of their taking Dandy from him. He never thought of that as a possibility—Dandy, who seemed after that wild night-ride to be part of himself.

"Go and open the door, and tell the sergeant to come here," said Ray.

But the instant the sergeant was released, he rushed out with fury in his eye, fell upon Hogan, seized him by the collar, and, with rage in every word and expletive, ordered him to go with him to the guard-house, swearing he'd teach him to resist an officer in the discharge of his duty. Hogan clinched his fist and looked first as though he would knock the sergeant into the next yard, which he was physically able to do, but discipline prevailed; he lifted neither hand nor voice, but simply looked appealingly at his own officer as the sergeant marched him past. Ray called to the irate infantryman to hold on a moment, he would explain; but Ray was in arrest and could give no orders. The sergeant knew that for the time being he was virtually the superior. He simply did not choose to hear the lieutenant, but went on with his prisoner across the parade, lodged him in the guard-house, then went to the quartermaster's and reported that he had been violently resisted by private Hogan, locked up by him in the paddock with the horse, and that as soon as he

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could get out he had "arrested private Hogan and confined him by your order, sir," the customary formula in such cases made and provided.

Meantime, Dandy, finding himself untied and the stable-door open, had ventured forth from the paddock while his master had hurried through the house to again fruitlessly call to the sergeant from the front door, and as the sorrel sniffed the mountain breeze and felt the glow of the sunshine on his glistening coat, all his love for a wild gallop had possessed him; he trotted out on the triangle in rear of the houses, looked triumphantly about him a second or two with his head high in air, his nostrils quivering, and his eyes dilating, then with a joyous snort and two or three exuberant plunges, with streaming mane and tail he tore away northward, and went careering over the prairie. Miss Sanford, seated near her window in an arm-chair—and a revery, heard the thunder of hoofs, and ran to see what it meant. She stood some minutes watching Dandy racing riderless over the springy turf before she knew that Grace, too, was by her side gazing from the same window. If Billy Ray could have seen those two faces when Marion turned to her friend—the quick, hot flush on one, the speaking eyes of both—he would never have done what he *did* do,—turn back to his room with a bitter imprecation on his lips, with anger and desolation in his heart, and, raising his hands in almost tragic gesture of impotent wrath as he glared around at the walls of his undeserved prison, he heartily damned the fates that had consigned him to the unsympathizing limits of an infantry garrison; he heartily included the colonel and quartermaster in his sweeping

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anathema; and then—oh, Ray! Ray! it was so weak, so pitifully weak!—he dragged forth the old demijohn, filled and drank a bumper of rye, hurled the goblet into flinders against the door, and threw himself upon his bed in an ecstasy of pent-up wrath and misery, just as Blake came tearing in to tell of Dandy's escapade. Yes, it was wofully weak, but as wofully human.

That the breach between the post authorities and the cavalry officers was widened by the day's occurrences goes without saying. Blake went and asked for Hogan's release on the ground that as a cavalryman he had done perfectly right in refusing to let the horse go until he had seen his own officer, but the colonel properly replied that that by no means justified or explained his locking up the sergeant, and in plain language said that Hogan should be tried forthwith. Blake then urged that Dandy, being a regimental horse, should be returned to Mr. Ray, as the colonel well knew the circumstances that had endeared them to each other; but the colonel replied that an officer in arrest had no use for a horse, and that Mr. Ray had no right to a public animal anyway. Again had the colonel law and right on his side. Then Blake declared that the whole regiment would resent such an action, and the colonel was punishing Ray before he was even tried; and the colonel, who was meek as Moses in the presence of his wife, and who preferred peace to war when there was any chance of becoming personally involved, but knew his strategical strength in this contest and was prepared to use it, most properly, pointedly, and justifiably told Mr. Blake that unless he, too, desired to figure as the

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accused before a court-martial for insubordinate conduct, he would mend his ways forthwith; meantime, to leave the office. And Blake went.

If Blake had been wise as Gleason he would have cultivated Mrs. Whaling's society instead of dropping her, as he did in this critical state of affairs. When the good lady called to see the ladies of the cavalry the next morning, she referred with poignant sorrow to the fact that those two misguided young men were drowning their sorrows in the flowing bowl. Mrs. Stannard ventured a disclaimer, but Mrs. Whaling had her information straight from the quartermaster, and was not to be downed. Mrs. Stannard wrote a few earnest words to Mr. Ray, making no mention of what she had just heard, but begging him not to lose heart at having to part with Dandy, and saying they would all be down to see him the next afternoon, and he must be sure and be ready to welcome them. Ray and Blake *had* been drinking confusion to the doughboys together during the evening, and the former was very feverish and excitable when the letter came. He knew well that somebody had already been telling her of his weakness, and it only angered him. He wrote no answer until later in the day; but when he did, it was to say that while he would be glad to see them to-morrow as suggested, he could not but feel disappointed that they had not come this very afternoon. But as they had not come, he and Blake proceeded to get into more mischief.

It almost broke Ray's heart when that morning Dandy was led past his window, and presently he saw the post quartermaster, a bulky youth of some forty

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summers, climb on his back, get a rein in each hand, and with knees well hunched up and elbows braced, settle himself according to his ideas of equestrianism in the big padded saddle. As Dandy felt a trifle fresh, and chafed under the weight of the heavy rider and heavy dragoon bit, he switched his tail and tossed his head, being instantly rewarded by a fierce jerk on the huge curb and a shout of "whoa there!" that stung him into amazed and suffering revolt and drove poor Ray almost distracted. Dandy's mouth was tender as a woman's. Ray rode him with the veriest feather touch on the rein, and to see his pet tortured by such ignorance was more than he could stand. He flew to the door, and shouted,—

"For God's sake, man, don't use that curb! He'll go all right if you give him his head." But the infantryman only glared, probably did not hear, he was so busy trying to keep his seat; and paying no attention to Ray, went alternately jerking and kicking up the row, while Dandy, startled, amazed, tortured, and high-strung, backed and plunged and tugged at the bit. A mother who sees her child abused by some ruffian of a big boy knows what Ray suffered from that scene. Only to such, and to the trooper who loves the horse who has borne him through charge after charge, who has been his comrade on campaign after campaign, shared wounds and danger and hunger and thirst with him, will Ray's next move be conceivable; he threw himself upon his bed, buried his face in his arms, and broke down utterly.

He and Blake concocted between them later in the day a letter to the colonel expressive of their views as

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to Dandy's rights; but the letter was so pointed a protest against their seizing a regimental horse for quasi-quartermaster's purposes, and so deep a sarcasm on infantry horsemanship, that it came back with a stinging reprimand. Even Warner felt it a slur. Then Blake tried another: setting forth that as neither the commanding officer nor the quartermaster had been in saddle since the war of the Rebellion,—if they had then, the latter being a promotion from the ranks,—they could not be expected to know what they, as cavalrymen, were required to know, that a horse of spirit was not to be ridden like a cast-iron mule; but luckily for Mr. Blake's chances for future usefulness the post surgeon dropped in just then, and casting his eye over the screed, coolly took and tore it up, sent Blake over to the hospital for the steward, chatted pleasantly with Ray while he dressed the wounded thigh, pointed significantly to the demijohn, saying, "There's where much of this fever comes from. No more of it, Ray." And then when Blake came back, took him out and gave him a rasping; told him that his hot-headedness was only making matters worse for Ray, and that he must take things quietly. He knew that Ray hadn't been treated right about the horse, but old Whaling couldn't be expected to have any more sentiment on such matters than his stolid quartermaster, and by fighting them he was simply doing harm. In fact, said the doctor, Ray is now in a very feverish and excitable state, and if this continue I cannot say what will result. So a more temperate letter was written, and Ray bowed to the yoke, and meekly signed a civil explanation to the quartermaster of the horse's char-

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acter and the proper way of handling him; but that worthy had meantime represented to the colonel that Mr. Ray had come to his door and sworn at him when he mounted that morning, and he would have no advice; and so by direction of the commanding officer a communication was sent to Mr. Ray to the effect that as he was no longer responsible for the care of the horse he would refrain from interference with or suggestions to the post quartermaster. This was the letter that Blake had brought in with a flourish; and that morning—all that day from eight A.M. until late in the afternoon, without water, without his customary feed, saddled and bridled, poor Dandy stood in the hot sun tied to a post in front of the quartermaster's house, in full view of Ray's front windows. The quartermaster was too stiff and chafed after yesterday's experiences to attempt to mount to-day, but he could worry the horse and madden Ray by keeping him tied there switching the flies from his scarred flanks, and wistfully neighing and pricking up his ears every time any one approached along the walk.

Blake had gone to town early in the morning after giving that letter to Ray. Hogan was in the guard-house a prisoner. Ray was penned to the limits of his house in arrest. He could only see and hear the suffering of his pet and not relieve him. Late in the day he called to a soldier going by and offered him a dollar to go to the horse and tie him to a post ten yards nearer where there was a little shade. The soldier untied and was leading him away while Dandy tripped gratefully after, when the quartermaster's Hibernian accents were heard thundering an order

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to "come back wid dthat harrse." The soldier saluted and said Mr. Ray had asked him just to move him into the shade, and the officer damned the man for not knowing better. Then Ray came to the door and asked the soldier to take Dandy a bucket of water, and as the man carried it and the horse pawed and whinnied at the welcome sight, the quartermaster appeared on his piazza, and shouted in wrath to the soldier not to interfere again or he'd "have him in the lock-up." And poor Dandy, like an equine Tantalus, was robbed of the needed fluid. Ray could bear no more. He kept one foot inside the door-way as his arrest demanded, but leaning far out, with blazing eyes and clinching fist he hurled his challenge at the quartermaster in a voice that rang along the row like the "to arms" of the trumpets.

"You cowardly brute! I'll horsewhip you before the whole garrison the moment I'm free!" The surgeon heard it and came hurrying to him. Mrs. Turner heard it and feared poor Mr. Ray must have been taking too much. The colonel heard it far up the row and incorporated it in the additional charge and specifications he was drawing up against Mr. Ray; but the ladies "up the row" were busy dressing to come down according to promise and see him, and they did not hear. Ah, no! Nine out of ten of those who read this may say it was all improbable, impossible, or, if true, that there was nothing but drink to explain poor Ray's frantic outburst; but ask any cavalryman who deserves the name, and we will rest the defence with him.

The ladies came as Mrs. Stannard had promised, and

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with anxious face the doctor met them at the gate. Mr. Ray was in no condition to see any one.

That night Mrs. Stannard returned with the doctor to his bedside. Ray was delirious, in a raging fever.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SHOT AT MIDNIGHT.

WHILE, as has been said, no further news of affairs at Russell reached the regiment before they plunged into the thick of the campaign and were soon cut off from all communication, there were still three or four days in which the officers could talk over matters and write their letters to be sent back from the intrenched camp at Goose Creek by the first party that was numerically strong enough to undertake the journey. The colonel had been furnished a brief synopsis of the charges against Ray, and Stannard swore with a mighty oath when he read them that from beginning to end the whole thing was made up by Gleason and that other scoundrel, Rallston. The officers came together, and Stannard told what he knew of Rallston's shadowy record in the past, and one by one Gleason's hints, sneers, and slurs about Ray were dragged to light and exploded. There were men sitting around the colonel's tent, a hardy, bushwhacking set of frontiersmen they all looked, who for very shame wished themselves

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away. Canker's cheeks burned as he recalled how often he had permitted Gleason to defame Ray. Crane and Wilkins hung their heads and tugged at their stubby beards, and looked uncomfortable, for the whole tenor of talk was an enthusiastic and vehement vote of confidence in the Kentuckian. Knowing him to be hot-headed and rash, there was great anxiety about him, and one impulsive fellow suggested that they all sign a letter to him expressing their belief in his innocence and their confidence in his cause. This would not do, said the colonel; it was tantamount to insubordination. Individually they were at liberty to write, but it must not be done as a regiment; and so it resulted that only two or three wrote to him, and one of these was Canker.

Stannard was not fully satisfied. It was agreed that at the very first opportunity they should have another general talk, and the officers had then gone to their various tents to send what might be the last messages home. They were to march over against the Rosebud at dawn, and it was only a few miles' gallop across the divide where Custer and his gallant men lay at their shallow graves, most of them by this time disinterred by prowling wolves or vengeful Indians.

Truscott, too, had written to Ray, and it was not easy. He had written to Grace a long letter, and that was harder still. Three days had elapsed since Gleason's explosive announcement of that strange tableau at his home. He had disdained to listen to explanation or to further statement. He would not condescend to ask Webb a single question; but he had called him aside that morning and said a quiet word.

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"Should you ever need a solution of what may have seemed a mystery to you, Webb, in what you mention having seen,—Mrs. Truscott and my friend Ray, I mean,—you have simply to remember that the news of that massacre over yonder has unnerved every woman in the army, and that Mrs. Truscott is not now in a condition to bear any shock. I had asked Ray to go regularly to my house."

He was incapable of doubting her. He would not doubt Ray, and yet—and yet there was something about the matter he did not like. She had written to him—three pages—that afternoon after it all occurred, and had mentioned nothing of Ray's being there, nothing of her having been agitated during his visit, nothing at all of it; and yet such a scene had occurred. He could account for there being a scene, but he could not reconcile himself to her utter silence upon the subject.

In his letter to Ray he, of course, said nothing of it. In his letter to his wife he gently, lovingly, pointed out to her that it was not right that he should be told by strangers of her being seen sobbing upon the sofa when alone with Mr. Ray, and that she should make no allusion to a matter that had struck them as so extraordinary. Could he have taken her in his strong arms and used just those words in speaking of it with all the grace of love and trust and tenderness accenting every syllable, she would never have mistaken the mood in which he wrote; but who that loves has not marked the wide difference between such words written and spoken? When the letter came it cut Grace to the heart, and it was the last letter to reach her in one whole month. The next had to come way around by the

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Yellowstone. Was it likely that in that intervening month she should care to see much of Ray?

All over the Northwest that column went marching and chasing after the now scattered bands of Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull: always on the trail, always pushing ahead. From the Tongue to the Rosebud; then over to the Powder; then up to the Yellowstone; then, while Miles went across after the fleeing Uncapapas and their wily old rascal of a leader, the Gray Fox gave his ragged followers a few days in which to bait their horses and patch their boots and breeches; then on he led them after the Ogallallas and Brulés, far across the Little Missouri, over to Heart River, where rations gave out; then down due south by compass through flooding rain, heading for the Black Hills, two weeks' march away. It was summer sunshine when they cut loose from tents and baggage at Goose Creek, with ten days' rations and the clothes they had on. It was freezing by night before they saw those tents and wagons again down in the southern hills, where they came dragging in late in September, having lived for days on the flesh of their slaughtered horses, and in all these weeks of marching and suffering and fighting no line had reached Stannard or Truscott or anybody from the wives at home. There were sore and anxious hearts among them, but those at home were sorer still.

It was the second week in August when those last letters came from the —th to Russell. It was the second week in September before they heard from them at the bivouac on the Yellowstone. It was the second week in October before the next news came,—the hurried letters

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brought down from the Black Hills, and telling of their homeward coming. It was the last week in October as they rode—bronzed and bearded and gaunt and thin, herding in the disarmed bands of Red Cloud—that the orders were received returning them to winter quarters far down along the Union Pacific, nearly ten days' march to the south; and meantime—meantime how very much had happened at Russell.

It was the twelfth day of Mr. Ray's arrest and the sixth of his sharp illness that Mr. Gleason arrived at the post and went to report to the commanding officer. Mrs. Truscott and Miss Sanford, seated on their piazza, saw him alight at his quarters from the stage; and immediately went in and closed their door. Mrs. Stannard had been with them awhile the evening previous. Ray was entirely out of danger and was sitting up again, but very quiet and weak. Gleason, it seems, had taken a roundabout way on his return, and had stopped two days at Fort Laramie, from which post he did considerable telegraphing. The mail coming direct from Fetterman brought those letters (which were sent by the sergeant) three days ahead of him, and not a lady in the cavalry quarters at Russell, except perhaps Mrs. Wilkins, would now receive him. Mrs. Stannard met him on the walk soon after his arrival, and passed him with a mere inclination of the head and the coldest possible mention of his name, but she saw he was thin and haggard and very anxious-looking. He was closeted with the post commander a long time, and came out looking worse. Old Whaling was swearing mad over a letter from Stannard and one from the commanding officer of the —th, plainly telling him that if

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he had been induced to take steps against Mr. Ray by any representations of Mr. Gleason, he would find himself heavily involved; and now Gleason plainly wanted to "crawfish," and to declare that Whaling had used as facts what he had only suggested as possibilities. Whaling was also notified that they proposed to ask the department commander to have proceedings against Ray suspended until the return of the regiment from the campaign, and meantime here was the young gentleman sick on his hands at the post, and that blundering, bullet-headed quartermaster of his had got him involved in another row. Mr. Blake had made an application to department headquarters for a board of officers to appraise the value of one public horse, which he, Lieutenant Blake, desired to purchase; had written to a staff friend at Omaha a graphic description of Dandy's and Ray's "devotion to each other," and the decree of divorce which was passed by Colonel Whaling's order. The quartermaster had meantime had Dandy out in the sun for two more days, tied to the post, and had been notified by Mr. Blake that if he ever spoke to him, except in the line of duty, he would kick him, and things were in almost as eruptive a state at Russell in this blessed month of August of the centennial year as they had been at old Sandy during the Pelham *régime*, only—only who could this time say it was a woman at the bottom of it?

And yet was it not Gleason's unrequited attentions to our heroine that prompted much of the trouble? Fie on it for a foul suggestion! Is woman to be held responsible for a row because more than one man falls in love with her?

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And yet again. She who has been so studiously kept in the background all these dreary chapters has been coming to the fore on her own account. In plain cavalry language, Miss Sanford has twice taken the bit in her teeth and bolted. Gleason once discovered, anent the club-room, that she had a temper. Mrs. Turner was the next to arrive at this conclusion. It was the day after Mr. Ray's illness began. Mrs. Whaling was paying an evening visit. Mrs. Turner had dropped in, as she often did where the ladies were apt to gather, and, despite Mrs. Truscott's polite and modest expression of her disagreement with Mrs. Whaling's views, that amiable lady persisted in descanting upon Mr. Ray's intemperate language and conduct, and repeatedly intimating that it was all due to intemperate drink. "The general" had said so, and that settled it. Miss Sanford sat with blazing eyes and cheeks that flushed redder and redder; she was biting her lip and tapping the carpet with the toe of her slipper. Mrs. Whaling was called away by some household demand before she had fairly finished her homily, and then Mrs. Turner, who had narrowly watched these symptoms, determined to test the depth of Miss Sanford's views upon the subject,—the revelation might be of interest.

"It does seem a pity that Mr. Ray should have done so much to ruin his fine record, does it not, Miss Sanford?"

"Ruin it! Mrs. Turner? Pardon me! but you speak of it as though you believed in his guilt,—as though you thought him culpable. If I were a lady of the —th, I should glory in the name he had made for it, and be defending, not abusing him." And,

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with the mien of a queen of tragedy, she swished out of the room to cool her fevered cheeks upon the piazza.

"Well!" gasped Mrs. Turner. "If I had supposed she *cared* for him I wouldn't have suggested such a thing an instant."

"It is not a question of her 'caring' for him as you say, Mrs. Turner," spoke up Mrs. Truscott, with unusual spirit. "He is my husband's warmest friend. We're all proud of him, all indignant at his treatment, and your language is simply incomprehensible!"

Just didn't Mrs. Turner tell that interview—with variations—all over the garrison within twenty-four hours? She had incentive enough; the ladies flocked to hear it, and one absurd maiden saw fit the next evening to simper her congratulations to Miss Sanford on "her engagement"; but by that time Marion had recovered her self-control. She met Mrs. Turner as though nothing of an unusual nature had occurred. She laughingly, even sweetly thanked the damsel, and told her she was engaged to no one.

But in another way she had come out like a heroine. She loved horses, as has been said. She had wept in secret over Mrs. Stannard's description of Dandy's seizure, and she was vehement with indignation at the subsequent treatment of Mr. Ray's pet and comrade. No one ever saw Marion Sanford so excited about anything before, said Grace; she could not refrain from going to the door every little while to see if Dandy were still tied there in front of the quartermaster's, and she would have gone to that functionary himself and implored him to send the horse back to the stable, only

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she could not trust herself to speak. But the second day she could stand it no longer; she boldly assailed Colonel Whaling, pointed out to him that for two days poor Dandy had been kept there in the hot sun, tortured by flies, and begged him to exert his authority and stop it. It made the quartermaster rabid. He knew somebody must have been interfering, but that night the colonel told him he must take better care of the sorrel, who was looking badly already, and ordered him to be returned to the corral for a day or two. But this very night, as Dandy was being led away, she heard Blake say to Mrs. Truscott,—

"I'd give anything to buy him and give him to Ray."

"*Could* you buy him?" she exclaimed, all flushing eagerness.

"Why, yes, if I had an unmortgaged cent, Miss Sanford," he said, with a nervous laugh.

She rose, her eyes and cheeks aflame, and stood before them, almost trembling, while her hands worked nervously,—

"Then *do* it! Mr. Blake. Don't let him suffer another minute! buy him—for me, no matter what he costs, and then—you give him to Mr. Ray. I—I mean every word of it. You can have the money this instant,—the check at least."

Grace sprang up and threw her arms around her neck. "You darling! How I wish I could do it!" was all she could say, but Miss Sanford was simply paying no attention to her. She was waiting to hear from Mr. Blake, who was too much astounded to speak. That evening it was all settled that Blake should make

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immediate application to purchase, and he went home spouting Shakespeare by the page, perfectly enraptured with this new and unsuspected trait in Marion, and perfectly satisfied that—it was not for him.

The paper went in, and, preceded by Blake's personal letter to the staff-officer, was forwarded to Omaha with an unfavorable endorsement. The post quartermaster had said that except the band horses there were none there that were not needed by the quartermaster's service, and daily in use. All the same the order was promptly issued, and came back in four days with the detail of Colonel Whaling, the post surgeon, and Mr. Warner. Gleason was not named,—a singular thing, since he was the only cavalry officer, except Blake, now for duty at the post, and they had begun officer of the day work. But the very day the board met Ray was out on his piazza taking the air with "extended limits," and rejoicing in the letters that had just come to him from the fellows at the front (the same mail had brought Mrs. Truscott that letter from Jack which sent her to her room in misery), and towards evening Mrs. Stannard came down to see him awhile, and hear his letters and tell him of her own. Mr. Gleason passed out of his quarters girt with sabre,—he was officer of the day,—and walked over towards the guard-house across the parade. Blake had gone "up the row." He wanted to give them a chance for a quiet talk, for Ray's heart was full of gratitude to the major's noble wife. She had nursed him like a mother in his delirium and illness; she had nursed him as she had other fellows when they were down, and they none of them forgot it. As Blake passed Number 11 and glanced

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back towards the rear windows, he saw a sight that, to use the words he often affected, "gave him pause."

Standing cap in hand at the back of the house was the soldier Hogan, a flush of mingled delight and surprise on his face, and his mouth expanded in a grin of embarrassed ecstasy. In front of him was Miss Sanford, daintily dressed as usual, holding out her hand. She caught sight of Blake, pressed something into Hogan's hand and sprang quickly back.

Can she be sending Ray a note? was his first thought. He concluded not to go in just then, but went on his way. That night Hogan was unusually conversational around the house. He was plainly exhilarated. He came to the room where the two officers were seated and stumbled over Mr. Blake's boots.

"What on earth do you want, Hogan?" asked Ray, looking up from his paper and pipe.

"I was wanting to clane the lootenant's pistol, sir, an' it isn't in the holster."

"You needn't clean it to-night," said Ray, coloring. "I want it."

"What the dickens do you want it for to-night?" said Blake. "Let him have it; it hasn't been cleaned for a month."

"Never mind, Hogan, not to-night."

"Could I be gone for a couple of hours, sir, if there's nothing else the lootenant wants?"

"Oh, yes, go ahead; I shall not need you until morning."

"Would the lootenant take care of this for me?" said Hogan, holding out two twenty-dollar bills. "I might lose it if I tuk too much."

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"Don't take too much, then, you sinner. Where did you get this money, sir?"

"Shure the lootenant mustn't blow on me," said Hogan, with rapture in his eyes and a glibness born of poteen on his tongue, "but that court-martial was the makin' of me fortune, sir. Shure not only did the lootenant an' Misther Blake give me a fine charactther and ten dollars to boot, but the moment do I get out of the gyard-house Mrs. Thruscott sends Flanigan for me, an' when I get there shure it's the young leddy as wants to see me. 'You're a good soldier, Mr. Hogan,' says she, 'and you're true to Dandy, you are.' 'Faix I am, ma'am,' says I, 'an' long life to him and the man that rides him,' says I. 'Shure it's he's the soldier, ma'am, and the boss rider of the regiment too.' 'I know it, Mr. Hogan,' says she, all a-blushin' like, 'an' I'm proud of ye for bein' so thrue to him in his throuble,' says she. 'Faix, an' the men would murther me, miss, if I wasn't,' says I; and so they would, begorra! and thin says she, 'Now how much did they punish you on that court?' says she. 'Tin dollars blind an' sivin days on the—in the gyard-house, ma'am,' says I; an' says she, 'Here's twinty for the tin they robbed ye of, and five for every day they kep' ye from yer masther an' Dandy.' An', begorra, lootenant, she ran in the house before iver I could shpake another wurrud."

"Go it, Mickey Free!" shouted Blake, roaring with laughter. Ray had grown redder and redder as the Irishman told his tale, and at last, laughing to cover his confusion, bade him begone.

That night was still and beautiful. Too excited by

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the events of the day to think of sleep, Marion Sanford was awake long after midnight. There was no moon, but the skies were cloudless, and a summer breeze played with the curtains of her open window. Far down by the stables she heard the call of the sentry at half-past twelve o'clock. A few minutes later there was a sharp, sudden report, as of a pistol, somewhere down the row; then as she sprang to the window she heard a stifled cry; then all was silence again—unless —was it fancy? She felt, rather than heard, a running footfall. Excited, startled, she hastily threw on a wrapper and shawl and ran in to Grace, who was sleeping quietly as before. Looking out on the parade, she could hear men running rapidly over from the guard-house. Something terrible had happened she now felt sure. Then a man was heard speeding up the walk towards the commanding officer's. She could see him as he darted by, and listened intently. He banged at the colonel's door, and then presently more men came hurrying by. Still she did not like to call; she feared to awaken or shock Grace. But in another minute, as a member of the guard ran by, Mrs. Stannard's clear voice floated out on the night air,—

"What is the matter, corporal?"

"Lieutenant Gleason's murdered, ma'am; shot dead in his room."

"Good heavens! Who *could* have done it?"

"I don't—leastwise, ma'am, they—they say 'twas Lieutenant Ray."

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CHAPTER XXIII.

IN CLOSER TOILS.

A CORONER'S inquest was in session at Russell, and in the benighted regions of the Eastern States where the functions of that worthy public officer are mainly exercised in connection with the "demnition moist" remains of the "found drowned," or the attenuated skeletons of the starved, there can be but faint conception of the divinity which doth hedge a coroner in a frontier city where people, as a rule, die with their boots on. Perhaps it was a proper consideration of the relative importance of the two offices which had induced Mr. Perkins to decline with thanks the nomination of territorial delegate to Congress, and to intimate through the columns of *The Blizzard* that he sought no higher office at the hands of the people than that in which, to the best of his humble ability, he had already served two terms. As the emoluments of the coronership were dependent entirely upon the number of inquests held during the year, the position in an Ohio town of five thousand inhabitants would hardly have taken precedence over a seat in the House of Representatives, but a lively frontier city, the supply centre of all the stock, mining, and trading enterprises to the north of the railway,—a town that had been the division terminus since the road was built, and was the recognized metropolis of the plains,—well, "that *was* different, some-

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how," said Mr. Perkins's friends; and, as his gleanings had been double those he would have received in Congress,—that is, in the way of salary,—Mr. Perkins had wisely decided that so long as "business was brisk" he preferred the exaltation of holding the most lucrative position in the gift of his fellow-citizens. His decision had been a disappointment to other aspirants, for not only pecuniarily was the office of first importance, but, in the very nature of his functions, the coroner acquired in the eyes of all men a mysterious interest and influence beside which the governor of the Territory, the mayor, and even the chief of the fire department felt themselves dwarfed into insignificance. For four years Mr. Perkins had been a busy man. He dispensed far more patronage than the delegate to Congress, as he was constantly besieged by a class of impecunious patriots to "put 'em on the next one." A stranger arriving by train and seeing a man shot down in front of some one of the gambling-saloons, would have been perplexed to account for the rush of the crowd in one direction, instead of scattering till the shooting was over and then concentrating to stare at the victim. It was a race for the coroner, and a place on the jury was the customary reward of the winner. Too much precipitancy in some such cases, resulting in the discovery by Mr. Perkins on arriving at the scene that the corpse was humorously waiting for him to "set up the drinks," had resulted in the establishment by him of a system of fines in the event of similar false alarms; but, as has been said, the coroner had reigned for several years as the wealthiest, the most envied and admired of the public officials. He had invested in mines

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and real estate, had become a money-lender and capitalist, and for some time considered himself on the high road to fortune, when the discovery of gold in the Black Hills caused a sudden hegira thither of nine-tenths of the shooting element, and the summer of '76 found Mr. Perkins a changed and embittered man.

"Cheyenne ain't what it used to be," he would regretfully say, as entire weeks would elapse without a fatal termination of a row; "fellers who used to shoot on sight only sit around and jaw now. It's gettin' slow as any d—d one-horse town east of the Mississippi." And in the general gloom of the situation Mr. Perkins had more than once regretted that he had not gone to Congress.

It was with a thrill of renewed hope, therefore, that he heard the loud knocking at his door before dawn, and descending, received with ill-concealed gratification the message of the commanding officer at Fort Russell that his services were needed there at once. An officer had been shot to death in his bedroom. It was one thing to air his importance before an admiring audience of townspeople; but this—this was something bordering on bliss. For the time being he could sit in judgment on the words and deeds of those military satraps at the fort. Perkins had bundled a jury of his chums into carriages and started out across the prairie before the smoke from the morning gun had fairly died away. By the time the men had finished breakfast the jury and the reporters were at their work, and an awe-stricken group stood silently at the gate of the little brown cottage wherein death had set his seal during the watches of the night.

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It was in the back room of the first floor that the jury had assembled. There on the narrow bed lay the mortal remains of the officer whose death-cry had startled the garrison so short a time before. Men and women had spoken with bated breath, with dread and horror on their faces, with heavy load at heart,—many had not slept at all,—since the news flew round the garrison at one o'clock. It was shocking to think of Mr. Gleason as murdered, but that he should have been murdered in cold blood, without a word of altercation, and murdered by an officer of his own regiment,—one so brave, so gifted, so popular as Ray,—was simply horrible; and yet—who that heard the evidence being given,—slowly, reluctantly, painfully—before that jury could arrive at any other conclusion. Even before the jury came sentries with fixed bayonet were stationed at Ray's bedroom door, and no one was allowed to go in or out except by order of the commanding officer.

The colonel had not gone to bed since being aroused. The moment the post surgeon had announced that Gleason was stone dead the body was lifted to the bed; Lieutenant Warner was placed in charge of the room, with orders to see that nothing was touched or removed, and the colonel began an immediate investigation. The sergeant of the guard, who, with one or two men, had been out searching the rear yards, had handed the colonel on his arrival a silver-mounted pistol,—Smith & Wesson's, of handsome make and finish, with every chamber loaded but one. He had picked it up just by the back gate. On the guard were engraved in monogram the letters W. P. R., and as the colonel held it up, Private Hogan, who had been assisting in raising

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the body to the bed, gave one quick look at it, exclaimed, "Oh, Holy Mother!" and hurried from the room. He was sternly called back, and came, white and trembling.

"Do you know that pistol, sir? Whose is it?"

Hogan wrung his hands and looked miserably around.

"Answer at once!"

"It's—it's the lootenant's, sir!"

"What lieutenant?"

"Misther Ray, sir. Oh, God forgive me!" sobbed poor Hogan, and, covering his face with his hands, he burst into tears.

"Where is Mr. Ray?" demanded the colonel, in a voice that trembled despite his strong effort at self-control.

"He was here, sir, when I came," said the sergeant of the guard. "He was kneeling over the body, and told me to hurry out on the prairie,—the murderer had run that way."

"Mr. Ray is in his quarters, colonel. I took him there just before you came," said Blake, entering at the moment, and Blake's face was white as death.

"Who was here besides Mr. Ray?" asked the colonel of the sergeant.

"Not a soul, sir. The body lay there on its face where the blood is on the floor, and Mr. Ray was kneeling beside it trying to turn it over, I thought. I was standing in front of the company quarters just over here, sir, when the shot was fired, and I heard the yell. I ran hard as I could straight here, and it wasn't half a minute."

"And you saw no one else at all?"

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"No one, sir. The lieutenant said the man as did it rushed out on the prairie between the hospital and the surgeon's, and it was dark, sir, and no use looking. Coming back, I picked up the pistol right by the gate."

"Stay here all of you," said the colonel. "Mr. Blake, I want *you*."

And in another moment Blake went silently up the row. The colonel's orders were that he should guard his comrade until relieved by the officer of the day with his sentries.

But the coroner's jury had investigated still further. The web of circumstantial evidence that had enveloped Ray by eight o'clock that August morning was simply appalling. It summed up about as follows. The sergeant of the guard had been making the rounds of the ordnance and commissary storehouses, and heard voices out on the prairie as of men coming from town; listening, he recognized those of Hogan and Shea, the latter being Lieutenant Gleason's orderly. They were apparently coming from the direction of the "house on the hill," as the resort out by the little prairie lake, previously described, was termed, and as they were not boisterous at all, though evidently "merry," he had not gone towards them, but, entering the main gate, he turned to the left to go to the guard-house, and was opposite the second set of company quarters when he heard voices at Lieutenant Gleason's, excited but unintelligible, then the shot, a scream, and he ran full tilt, not more than two hundred yards, into the house and through the little hall to the back room, where a light was burning. There lay Lieutenant Gleason on his face with his head to the back door, which was open,

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while Lieutenant Ray was kneeling between the body and the back door. All he said was, "Quick! the man who did it ran out on the prairie past the doctor's," and the sergeant had pursued, but returned in a moment or two, having seen nobody but Hogan and Shea, who came running back with him. Shea went for the doctor and Hogan to call Lieutenant Blake. The corporal of the guard then arrived with two men. They sent one for the colonel. Lieutenant Ray again told them to hunt the murderer, but they found nothing but the pistol. When they returned the second time the colonel and surgeon were there, but Mr. Ray was gone.

Shea's testimony was sensational: Hogan had come to him about tattoo, and proposed that they should go out and have a quiet time at the house on the hill; he had plenty of money and had already been drinking a little. Shea went, but fearing Hogan would take too much and get into more trouble, had persuaded him to start for home about 11.30. They came across the prairie and were talking pretty loud, heard no pistol-shot, or cry, saw or heard no one except the sergeant, though they had come through the gap between the hospital and surgeon's quarters. Shea said that he had been Mr. Gleason's "striker" (soldier-servant) for two years; knew his character and habits well, and knew there was trouble between him and Mr. Ray. Questioned as to particulars, Shea went on to say that there had been a "terrible row" between them the day Mr. Gleason started for Fetterman; he didn't know what it was about, but had overheard some of the language from the back kitchen, and the last thing Lieutenant Ray had said was, "'If ever you breathe a word of this to a

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soul,' or something like that, 'I'll shoot you like a dog.'" He was sure of the last words, and he thought then he wouldn't like to be in Mr. Gleason's place. Shea's words produced a marked effect; but no more so than did Hogan's, whom grief and liquor had made somewhat maudlin. Like every Irishman in the regiment he thought the world of Ray, and it cut him to the heart to have to testify against him; but he recognized the pistol at once as the lieutenant's, and the fact was dragged out of him that before tattoo the previous evening he had gone to get it and clean it, and found it was not in the holster. He asked the lieutenant for it and was refused. "I want it" was what the lieutenant had said.

Mr. Blake, very calm and very white, was brought in next, and faced the impressive coroner and his jury. He corroborated Hogan's statement as to Ray's language about the pistol; said that he had gone to bed up-stairs at eleven o'clock, leaving Ray reading in the room below, and knew nothing more of the affair until called by Hogan, when he had run to Mr. Gleason's quarters, and after a moment had taken Ray home and insisted on his going to bed. The lieutenant was just recovering from a severe illness, was weak and unstrung, and the affair threatened to bring on a relapse. There had been an open breach between the two officers for over two years, and of late, he knew not how, it had widened. The deceased frequently maligned Lieutenant Ray, and the latter never spoke of him without aversion. Questioned as to his knowledge of anything that occurred between them on the day of Gleason's departure, he said he knew nothing. Ray had refused

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to talk on the subject. The surgeon had given the necessary medical testimony as to cause,—a gunshot wound penetrating the heart and causing almost instant death. The post commander told of the charges against Lieutenant Ray, and of the fact that the deceased was a principal witness—indeed, an accuser, and that seemed all that was necessary. The jury desired to hear what Mr. Ray had to say, and they questioned the doctor as to his ability to see them. The surgeon had replied with professional gravity that so far as he was concerned he thought his patient should not be disturbed, but that the gentleman himself had insisted that no obstacle should be thrown in their way if they felt disposed to examine him. Mr. Ray was cool as a cucumber, though fully aware by this time of the fearful array of evidence against him. Blake flew back to his bedside as soon as he heard that the coroner had decided to question him, and with tears in his eyes implored him to say nothing; but Ray had smiled faintly, and held out a warning hand,—

"I've never hidden a word or deed of my life, Blake, and what has to be hidden now is for another's sake—not mine. Time enough for lawyers when the case comes to trial. A coroner's jury can only express an opinion. I could not rest easy now without the vindication of a full trial."

And so the coroner and his jury filed solemnly in. Ray's voice was placid and his eyes steadfast and true. He was courtesy itself to the members of the jury, and all patience even under the insinuations of the coroner that made Blake furious. His story was briefly that he had strolled out to his rear gate to walk up and

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down in the yard a few minutes before retiring. (He did not say "To gaze at a certain window up the row.") Being in arrest he was permitted to go no farther, and just after the sentry's call of half-past twelve he was startled by hearing excited voices apparently in the rear room of the quarters two doors away, then a shot and a scream; he had hurried thither, and at the back gate of Gleason's quarters a man rushed past him on tiptoe and at full speed. Ray had caught his arm an instant but was thrown roughly aside, and the fugitive had fled like a deer through the open space between the hospital and surgeon's quarters. He himself was weak from recent illness and unable to pursue, but hurried into the back door of Gleason's quarters, which was open, through the kitchen, and there, lying on his face in the back room, was the deceased, dressed in shirt and trousers, apparently even then dead. The sergeant came almost immediately, and soon Mr. Blake, who presently reminded him that he was in arrest and had no right to be in any quarters but his own, and took him home.

Questioned as to enmity with the deceased, he said he had long disliked him, and that of late the feeling had become intensified. Questioned as to the affair of the day on which the deceased had left the post, he admitted there had been a violent scene, and that he had threatened him. He also admitted that the pistol was his, but that it had *not been in his possession since the day the deceased left the post.* Questioned as to the cause of his quarrel and some further matters, he spoke very quietly, as follows:

"These are matters, gentlemen, that cannot influence

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your decision. No statement of mine can well counteract the chain of circumstances in this case. I cannot tell you where my pistol was, and I must decline to say one word at present of the cause of my late quarrel with the deceased." In this he was firm, and what other verdict could they arrive at? The deceased came to his death by a gunshot wound inflicted with murderous intent, and, to the best of their belief, by the hand of William P. Ray, a lieutenant in the —th Regiment of Cavalry, U. S. Army.

When they were gone to their deliberation and Ray was alone with his friend, he called for a scrap of note-paper, thought earnestly a few moments, and then rapidly wrote in pencil a few lines.

"Blake," he said, "take this to Mrs. Truscott and give it to her personally. There will probably be no answer. If you cannot see her, ask for Miss Sanford."

They were all in the parlor, Mrs. Stannard, Mrs. Truscott, and Miss Sanford, when he reached the house. Three sadder faces he had never seen. The first question was as to the verdict of the coroner's jury. Blake shook his head. "It can only be one thing." Indeed, was not that what Mrs. Whaling had been there to tell them already, with a simply maddening array of embellishments?

Mrs. Stannard's blue eyes were red with weeping, and Mrs. Truscott looked as though she had wept for hours. Indeed, she had been, long before the shot was fired. Marion Sanford alone was quiet and composed; her eyes were clear as ever, though deep dark rings had formed beneath them, and her soft lips were set in con-

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stant effort to repress emotion. Blake briefly told them how calm and brave Ray was, how he had refused to explain about the pistol, or to give any particulars of his quarrel with Gleason, merely saying it had been of long standing. There were many things that he, Blake, must attend to at once, and so, if they would excuse him, he wished to see Mrs. Truscott a moment, and she followed him to the piazza falteringly.

"Ray told me to give this note to no one but you, Mrs. Truscott, and I inferred that he wished you only to see it," said he.

To his surprise, she drew back her hand. Her lips began to quiver, her eyes to refill. She made no effort to take it. He looked at her wonderingly.

"Mr. Blake—I—I cannot take it. I cannot explain!" And then, abruptly turning, she rushed into the house and up the stairs.

Poor Blake stood one moment in dire perplexity and then went back.

"She wouldn't take it, Billy. She said she couldn't; but d—n me if I can fathom it."

Ray's eyes grew stony. Every vestige of color left his face. He covered it with his thin white hands, and the man who had braved death and torture to save his comrades, who had borne uncomplainingly, resolutely, patiently, the trying ordeal of his examination by a gang of suspicious men, who had suffered in silence the ignominy of a criminal charge rather than drag to light a defence that might involve a woman's name, now quivered and shuddered and turned to the wall with one low moan of agony, cut to the heart by the fragile hand he would have died to shield.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GRASP OF THE LAW.

To a man of Mr. Blake's temperament the next few days were hard to bear. He was worried half to death, and yet, when Mrs. Turner saw an opportunity, and with a suggestive glance at his lean legs, sympathetically inquired "if he wasn't afraid he'd lose *all* his flesh," he was fully able to appreciate the feminine dexterity and malice of the allusion. His quick wit could have suggested a deserved repartee; but even in his misery Blake would say no wounding word to a lady of the regiment. He had good reason to take very little comfort in her, however, as an exponent of the regimental feeling on which the —th had prided itself. Mrs. Turner was far too voluble on the subject of the awful disgrace that had been brought on their good name by this fearful tragedy, and while she hoped and prayed Mr. Ray might be innocent, it was evident that she was far from believing it a possibility. Just now her time was taken up with Mrs. Whaling and the infantry officers, for there was a blockade at number 11. The ladies had twice asked to be excused when Mrs. Whaling and Mrs. Turner called. Mrs. Truscott was feeling unable to see any one, said the servant, but Mrs. Stannard was with her.

But Blake had expected nothing better of Mrs. Turner, and attached little importance to her opinion.

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What had stung him to the quick was the sight of Ray's suffering when that note came back to him refused. He was amazed at Mrs. Truscott, for to his masculine mind and to Ray's worn and wearied senses only one construction of her conduct was apparent,—she believed him guilty, and shrank from his note as she would from his blood-stained hand. Of that desolate night neither he nor Ray could ever be brought to speak thereafter. Blake sat for hours by the bedside of his stricken friend listening in helpless misery and wrath to the occasional changing of the sentries, and watching, as a sorrowing mother might watch, Ray's wordless suffering. Most of the night he lay with his face buried in his arms; but Blake could see by the clinching hand, the shudders that often shook his frame, the constant, nervous tapping of his foot beneath the coverlet, that he was wide awake,—alive to all his sorrows. The doctor had come and prescribed sedatives, and promised to come again if he did not sleep. Ray had silently taken the medicine, and for one instant Blake had caught sight of the face that was now dear to him as any brother's. He threw himself on his knees and tried to draw the hands away as Ray once again turned to the wall.

"For God's sake, Billy," he wellnigh sobbed, "don't turn from me so! There ain't a man in all the —th could believe it of you. What need you care for what a nervous woman thinks?"

But Ray only pressed his hand a moment, and simply said,—

"I'll come round all right—after a while. Don't worry, old fellow."

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But he hadn't "come round." At midnight Blake decided he must have a drink, and he offered Ray some whiskey, thinking to benefit him in some way. Ray heard, and said nothing, but put out his hand and gently pushed it away, shaking his head, and this capped the climax of Blake's perplexity. At one o'clock, seeing that Ray was still wide awake, he had decided to go and fetch the doctor. He was fearful of the effect of this long mental strain, but Ray seemed to divine his thoughts, and in a voice so soft and patient as to melt Blake's raging into tears, he begged him not to disturb any one. "I've got you, Blake; what do I want of a doctor?"

Along towards morning Blake dragged in his buffalo-robes, and spreading them on the floor by the bedside, soon dropped into a sleep of utter exhaustion. When he awoke Ray was standing at the window, cleanly shaved, dressed in his newest and neatest undress uniform, and listening calmly to Mr. Warner, who, in a voice plainly showing his agitation, was saying something that brought Blake to his feet with a single bound. A warrant had been issued as the natural result of the inquest, the officers of the law had come out from town, and it was the commanding officer's order that he be turned over to the custody of the civil authorities.

Blake would have burst into a fury of invective and denunciation, but Ray's hand restrained him. Still weak from his unhealed wound, from recent illness, from mental agitation and sleeplessness, Blake thought he never saw Ray so brave, so strong, as when he made his reply.

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"It was my expectation to see the commanding officer this morning, Mr. Warner, as my dress indicates. Since he remands me to the charge of the civil authorities, what I had to say to him must be said to them. I shall be ready as soon as I can change to civilian dress."

And so, with only Blake to help stow away the few books and papers he desired to lock in his trunk,—for even faithful Hogan had been forbidden to enter the room,—Ray quietly made his preparations, and in a few minutes stood arrayed in a business suit that had been made for him years before, and was decidedly out of fashion. A carriage had driven to his door, and two heavily-built men were lounging at the gate. Blake, wild with nervousness and wrath, was making slow progress with his dressing, and Ray took from him the little hand-bag he was bunglingly striving to pack.

"I'll do this, Blake. You go on with your dressing. Of course I understand you mean to go in with me; but now let me say a word. I have had plenty of time to think, and this is just what I want, what I must have. Nothing short of a full trial can satisfy me now; and as for being handed over to the civil authorities,—well, is it any worse than what I have had to bear *here*?"

"By heaven! but there'll come a day of reckoning for that cold-blooded, soulless, bowelless, old block in the headquarters office. Just think of the kicking he'll get when the —th comes home! But, Ray, what I'm worried about is this,—bail, you know. You can't stay there in jail, and I don't know any of these local plutocrats——"

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"I've thought of all that. You are to ask *no* one. If I were out on bail I would have to come back *here*, and in all the world there is no spot where I have known such misery. I prefer the jail at Cheyenne to such freedom as this has been at Russell. In a few days my sister will reach me, and then we'll see. Now hurry, I want to get away before guard-mounting."

In a few minutes Blake was ready, and Ray told him to call in the officers. They entered the room, and the first one, as he did so, by an instinct which he could not himself explain, took off his hat as he caught sight of Ray standing quietly at the window; his followers, though evidently unused to such a display, followed suit. The leader began to read his warrant, but Ray raised his hand and smilingly checked him.

"Never mind it, my friend; it is all in due form, no doubt. You brought handcuffs, I suppose?"

And the man was already fumbling in his left pocket for them. Ray went on in the same quiet tone,—

"You won't need them, so keep them in your pocket. I am glad to go with you now if you are ready."

And the officer, who, like every man in Cheyenne, had heard all about the night ride that saved Wayne's command, and respected the "young feller" that made it, was glad to find an awkward question put out of his way. He had reddened with embarrassment, but was grateful to Ray for taking the trouble off his mind. As they left the house, and poor Hogan, looking over the banisters up-stairs, broke into an Irish wail of grief, and the corporal of the guard instinctively brought his left hand up to the shoulder in a salute that made his musket ring, a casual observer would

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have said that Mr. Ray was showing his visitors to their carriage. The door shut with a snap, the horses started with a crack of the whip, and in another moment the silent quartette were whirled away through the east gate before anybody "up the row" was fully aware of what was going on.

Meantime, there had been a night of misery elsewhere in the garrison. Mrs. Stannard had asked permission of the officer of the day to go to Ray with the doctor at nine o'clock; the officer of the day said he would go and see the colonel and let her know. He went, but did not return. At ten o'clock Mrs. Stannard wrote a note to the colonel, and that punctilious soldier replied through his adjutant at half-past ten. He was very sorry, but for several reasons he was compelled to refuse all applications to see Mr. Ray until the morrow. Mrs. Stannard in her indignation could hardly find words to thank Mr. Warner for the courtesy he personally displayed in the matter. She sent a servant to the corporal of the guard to ask him to say to Mr. Blake that she desired earnestly to see him a moment; the corporal said he would as soon as he had posted the next sentry; but he forgot it until long after eleven, owing to an excitement over in the band quarters, and then Blake thought it best to wait until morning, and so it happened that one woman whose heart was full of faith in and sympathy for Ray was balked of her desire to send him full assurance of her thought for him. She could not sleep, however, and at midnight walked alone down the row and asked the soldier at the gate to give this little note for Ray to the sentinel within, but the man came sadly and respectfully back.

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The sentry dare not pass it in: it was against his orders. She looked wistfully at the dim light showing through the curtains of the front room, but turned wearily away. A dim light was burning, too, in Mrs. Truscott's room up the row, and she tapped softly at the door, thinking that, like herself, they might be still awake; but no answer came, and, at last, she went to her own lonely quarters. Oh, how she longed for her brave, blunt, outspoken Luce that night! He could find a way of helping Ray, and would do it despite all the official trammels that the post commander could devise. She was sick at heart, but next door lay a woman whose unrest was greater still, whose trouble seemed more than she could bear. Mrs. Truscott had arrived at the conclusion before ten o'clock that night that she was the most miserable woman on the face of the globe.

Jack's letter arriving the day previous was as kind, as well expressed, and as thoughtful a screed as ever mortal husband penned, but, being like other husbands, only mortal, he had failed to bring about the exact effect which was intended. Whether this was his fault or hers could not be determined entirely by an inspection of a copy of the letter, since letters may be read with a thousand different inflections, and the most passionate heart-offering be made to sound like a torrent of sarcasm. Perhaps it is neither here nor there whose fault it was. Grace read the letter with burning self-reproach. It was the second time he had had reason to find fault with her. True, she had acted as she supposed for the best, and after consultation with Mrs. Stannard. Mrs. Stannard's letter was to go by the next

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mail and explain the whole thing to the major, who, if he deemed advisable, would carry everything to Truscott; but, as we have seen, that explanatory letter had never reached the regiment. It, with bags full of other letters, was lying in the wagons at Goose Creek, while the —th was on the chase away to the Yellowstone, and Grace had the misery of believing that Jack's last thought of her as he rode off to battle was that she had had some sentimental scene with Ray, had been surprised in the midst of it, and had concealed it from him. She had spent a distracted afternoon, had written Jack page after page, in which amid tears and kisses she had recorded her determination never to let another man see her alone an instant, never to receive a note of any kind from Ray or anybody else, never to *speak* to a man if she could help it; she hated them all,—all but one, whom she had wronged and deceived, and whom she adored and worshipped now, and heaven only knows what all! She felt comforted somehow when she had slipped that letter into the box at the adjutant's office late that night, and had gone so soundly asleep that she might not have known of the murder until morning but for Marion. And then, that next afternoon,—that *very* next afternoon, after she had written all her impulsive, wifelike, loving promises to Jack, what should come but a note from Ray to be delivered privately to her. Let any young wife of less than a year's disenchantment put herself in Mrs. Truscott's place and say what she would have done. Of course, dear madam, I hear you say, *vous autres*, "She needn't have made such a fool of herself! She might have explained or—something!" I quite agree with you.

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That is what all of us think who have survived the delirium of the honeymoon, that *mielle de la lune-acy* which all of us must encounter as our children do the measles; but, you see, Mrs. Truscott was not yet through with it, and what is more, I have heard you remark on several occasions that she was an awfully weak sort of a heroine and would make Jack wretched yet. Bless your womanly hearts! I never pretended that she was a Zenobia, or a Jeanne la Pucelle, or a Susan B. Anthony. She was absurd, if you will, but she was utterly in love with her husband, as Mrs. Turner said, and thought far more of him than the rest of mankind put together, which is more than some of you can say, though I'm bound to admit that she had better reason than most of you, *placens uxor mea* frankly included.

She had rushed up-stairs for a fresh burst of tears, and presently Marion, all love and sympathy, came to see her, and the result of that interview complicated matters in a way that baffles description. So far from upholding her course, Miss Sanford had looked first grave, then frightened, then indignant. In plain words she told her that at such a time, when the man who had saved her life,—saved her honor,—showed himself her best friend, her husband's best friend, stood charged with a foul crime of which she well knew him to be guiltless, and had sent her a simple note that could have no possible purpose other than to say that now, at last, he might, to save his own name, have to tell of Gleason's fiendish conduct towards her—to refuse it, to send it back—"Oh, Grace, Grace, you *don't* mean you could have done *that!* Oh, it was monstrous! it was shameful!"

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And Marion Sanford had rushed into her own room, banged—yes, *banged* the door, locked it, put a chair against it, would have moved the washstand up against it, but her strength gave out, and she hurled herself upon the bed in a tempest of passionate tears.

Ah, well! even now—ten years after—it is no easy thing to write or tell of those days. It was part of our purpose to go around the garrison and show how other people looked at the matter, but it may be as well to say that, except Blake, Warner, and the surgeon, every officer thought Ray guilty. So, too, did most of the men except over in the band quarters, where there was the excitement that night. It was caused by the snare drummer, a pugnacious young Celt, who burst in upon his comrades at eleven o'clock with a loud defiance of "doughboy" justice, and an oath that he know'd the man as shot Gleason and suspicioned Ray, and he'd have him at the gallows yet.

Reporters and special correspondents had been at the fort interviewing everybody who would talk and, after the manner of their kind, making the dumb speak in a way that would put to the blush the miracles of holy writ. There seemed but one theory among those in authority,—that Ray was guilty. This was duly heralded to an eager public, and the evening extra and the morning journals in columns of detail had prepared all minds for the culprit's coming. A crowd that blocked the street had gathered in front of the building in which were located the offices of the marshal, the sheriff, and other legal magnates, and Ray's pale, sad face looked out upon a host of curious eyes, in which his own, brave and unflinching, caught not one gleam

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of sympathy. Deadwood Dick, a ruffian who had murdered a soldier for his money, went in through that door-way a fortnight before amid many shouts of encouragement and the buoyant reflection that no local jury had yet found a verdict of guilty against a citizen of Wyoming where the offence committed was against the peace or property of Uncle Sam. But a jury that would triumphantly acquit the self-styled "Scourge of Sandy Bottom" on the ground of temporary insanity would be apt to look less leniently upon one of those swells at the fort. Had there been a man to raise the *à la lanterne* of rejoicing democracy,—had not the murdered man been himself one of the official class, Blake and his revolver would probably have stood alone between the accused and lynching. As it was, but for the one faithful comrade of all who had loved and believed in him, realizing it all, yet calm, sad, and self-possessed, Ray stood at the bar of justice practically friendless.

It was early when Mrs. Stannard came down from her room after an almost sleepless night. First call for guard-mounting was just sounding as she stepped out on the piazza and noted little knots of men here and there, all gazing intently towards the east gate, where the dust as of a recently passing vehicle was settling back to earth. She opened Mrs. Truscott's door, and saw Marion Sanford slowly descending the stairs, her face very white and wan. Out in the dining-room could be heard voluble voices, weeping, and Irish expletives of mingled wrath and grief,—and then, with eyes dilating with horror, with streaming hair, with pallid lips and a ghastly look in her white face, Grace

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Truscott, clad in a morning wrapper, came rushing through the little parlor into the hall, gave one glance at her girl friend, and then, stretching forth her arms, she cried,—

"Oh, Maidie, Maidie! It's all my doing. They—they've ca-carried him off to jail!"

And then prone upon the stairs she threw herself, burying her face from sight of all.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHOSE GAUNTLET?

THE duty of assorting the papers and caring for the property of the late officer had devolved upon Lieutenant Warner. Telegrams from relatives in the distant East had requested that the remains be sent thither by express for burial, and only a few hours after the accused murderer was taken into custody the body of the victim of the midnight assassination had been turned over to the undertaker in town for necessary preparations. The garrison seemed still paralyzed by the shock, and except the sentries at the storehouses and stables, there was little appearance of military duty going on. Guard-mounting was conducted without music, and the customary drills of the recruits were out of sight. It was an atmosphere of gloom that pervaded the garrison, and only one of its ladies had been seen on the promenade for two days. Mrs. Whaling, like some

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human fungus, seemed to thrive in the pall-like depth of the social darkness and depression. She circled from house to house, and swooped down upon the inmates, flapping and croaking the old story of woe and foreboding; or, what was welcome in comparison, some new tale of further entanglement for Ray. Judging from that righteous lady's conversation, there seemed no doubt that she and the Omnipotent Judge had settled it between them just when he was to be hanged. She was one of the first to receive and to enlighten with her views a serious young man who came from Denver with a letter to the commanding officer, and brought with him a prominent and rising attorney from Cheyenne. These gentlemen seemed a trifle disconcerted at the fact that the few questions they addressed to the colonel were promptly answered by his wife, and when one of them finally looked at the other and remarked that it was time to go and examine the premises and the effects, the bearer of the letter not unnaturally hesitated and coughed dubiously,—he did not know whether to ask permission of the officer or the lady. They declined her invitation to have a cup of tea and some luncheon, saying they had dined in town, and the colonel said he would walk down with them. Only Mr. Warner had been allowed in the quarters since the inquest.

They had gone but a few steps along the walk when a hack drove up, and Mr. Blake, catching sight of them from its interior, shouted to the driver, sprang out, and, stiffly saluting the commanding officer, handed the lawyer a batch of telegraphic despatches, and, taking the little man from Denver to one side, said a few

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words to him in a whisper, then turned, and was walking away, when the colonel concluded it time to assert himself.

"Mr. Blake!" he called.

"Sir," said Blake, facing him but coming no nearer.

"You appear to have been in town, sir. Had you permission to leave the post?"

"I did not think to ask, sir. As the only friend Mr. Ray appeared to have in this garrison I went with him to jail."

"You will think, hereafter, and not presume to go without my consent."

"Then I take this opportunity to ask permission, colonel; I desire to return to my friend this afternoon, —in ten minutes in fact."

"The post regulations, sir, require that such applications should be made at my office between nine and ten A.M. I am not disposed to consider them at other times, especially where gentlemen absent themselves without authority." And he turned majestically away.

"Am I to understand, colonel, that you refuse me permission to return to Mr. Ray in such an emergency as this?" choked Blake.

"I will consider it, sir. I will take it into—ahem! —consideration when I have finished other matters. Now, gentlemen, we will proceed." And so, having established the fact that after all he was the post commander, and laid the ghost of their lingering doubt, Colonel Whaling led on down the row with the duly reassured civilians, and Blake, too much saddened by recent events to feel the wrath that at other times would have overpowered him, contented himself with glaring

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after his chief a moment, ejaculating, "The bloodless old mummy!" and then turning on his heel, he went to his lonely quarters.

The lawyer read the despatches, handed them to his Denver friend, pointing significantly to a clause in one of them, and the colonel felt himself omitted from their confidences. The sentry at the door of the quarters lately occupied by Mr. Gleason presented arms to the post commander and looked inquiringly at the civilians. "You may admit these two gentlemen," he said, "and pass them in and out, but no one else except the adjutant. Is he here now?"

Mr. Warner's voice from within answered yes, and the party entered. The adjutant was seated at a table in the front room with a pile of envelopes and letters before him. He rose as they entered.

"Mr. Warner," said the colonel, "this gentleman is sent here from Denver under telegraphic request from department headquarters. They failed to notify me of such intention," he added, in a tone of official grievance, "but I presume it is all right. He is a member of the Mountain Detective force, and desires to make full inspection of the premises. I presume you can confer with him and with Mr.—a—Green."

He lingered a moment as though in expectation of an invitation to remain, but none came.

Blake meantime had been searching about Ray's room. He ransacked through an old valise that lay under the camp-bed, tossing diaries, scouting books, itineraries, rough field maps and sketches out on the floor, until he came to a package marked "Mem. Receipts." This he glanced through, gave it a satisfied

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slap, and stowed it in a portable writing-desk, replaced in the valise the disturbed items, and then went on packing some changes of underclothing and linen in Ray's little trunk. Twice he called for Hogan, but the shouts were unanswered. He went to the door to summon the hack-driver to take the trunk, and the man said that a lady had just stepped down to ask if he would come up there to number eleven when he could find time. Looking thither, he saw Mrs. Stannard at the open door of Truscott's quarters, and went at once. Her voice trembled so that she could hardly ask for Ray.

"He is just what those who know him would expect him to be, Mrs. Stannard, calm and resolute. I never saw a man appear to better advantage than he did before the officials there in town. I never knew how much there was in him until to-day. Mr. Green tendered his legal services and had a short talk with him, and he's out here now; so is a detective from Denver, and Colonel Rand will get here from department headquarters to-morrow. Oh, we shan't be without friends, though it did look mighty like it at first."

"But what about bail, Mr. Blake? How soon can he—will he return here?"

"He desires no bail, Mrs. Stannard; jail is preferable to Fort Russell so far as his treatment is concerned," he said, indignantly. "You seem to be the only friend he has."

Mrs. Stannard flushed and lowered her voice.

"Did you explain to him, or rather did he ask why Mrs. Truscott could not receive his letter?"

"What was there to explain? What was there to

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ask?" he broke forth in wrath. "Only one explanation was possible, and of course I would not speak of it. What could any one think but that she believed him guilty, and would have no communication with him?"

That was a shot that told. Before Mrs. Stannard could reply there was a rustle of skirts and a stifled sob within the hall-way, a rush of light footsteps up the stairs, but the door opened and Marion Sanford appeared. Blake started to see how white and wan and sad she looked, but she came straight to him.

"Good-morning, Mr. Blake; we were coming out to see you as you spoke, Mrs. Truscott and I. We do not wonder that you and Mr. Ray should feel as you do, but that was all a piteous mistake about that letter last night." She held forth her soft white hand. "Shake hands, Mr. Blake. It wasn't at all what you thought; it was a very, very different reason, and he will forgive when he knows. You brought a note from him last night. Will you take this to him from me?"

"Let me run in and see Mrs. Truscott a moment," said Mrs. Stannard at this juncture, and hurried into the hall, leaving them alone on the piazza.

Blake noted the dark circles under her pleading eyes; he saw plainly the evidences of anxiety and sorrow; he could not but see that, despite the resolution of her words and manner, her voice was tremulous, and the brave eyes that looked unflinchingly into his were filling with tears she could not repress. He recalled all her enthusiasm in that still uncompleted purchase of Dandy, in her munificence to Hogan. He knew well that no matter how he might have misjudged Mrs. Trus-

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cott's motives he had no right or reason, whatever, in letting himself think that this brave, glorious, loyal girl could have been shaken one instant in her faith in his friend. Why, even Ray had checked him sternly when, during the night, he had once burst forth in an impetuous tirade against the worthlessness of a woman's faith, and now he could have kicked himself had it been anatomically possible even for his marvellous length and loose-jointedness of leg. In default thereof he would have dropped on his knee; but somebody, several somebodies, watched the interesting interview from a distance. He bowed over the extended hand as a courtier might over that of a queen; he wished he dare kiss it on the same—on any basis, but he took it warmly.

"Forgive me for every word, Miss Sanford; but I've been sore tried of late."

"I would be less apt to forgive you if you did *not* resent every suspicion of Mr. Ray. It is too late to undo last night's wretched work, or the misery it caused us. I have tried to explain it all for Mrs. Truscott, but what I want now is to know what he needs. Is it money, or influence, or anything? Tell me truly, Mr. Blake; I want to know all you can tell me."

"You shall know before I tell another soul. As yet, —forgive me again,—this will supply his greatest need." And holding up her note, he turned quickly away.

She was blushing now—crimson,—but there was something she had to know, and so recalled him.

"Has anything new been discovered,—have any steps been taken towards finding the murderer?"

"Mr. Green, the lawyer whom we have consulted,

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has had an interview with Ray, and he has a clue now of some kind that is being investigated."

"And you know whom he suspects?"

"He has not told me, Miss Sanford, and—something that occurred recently in the garrison had set me to asking him questions which he declined to answer,—another matter entirely,—I saw he had reasons for keeping it to himself——"

"Mr. Blake, have you still that note he sent last night?"

"No; he burned that this morning."

"Has he said nothing—nothing to indicate whom he suspects?"

"Not to me—as yet. We have had too much to attend to, perhaps, but it is plainly something he hates to allude to."

"Look! Mr. Blake; they are calling you—down the row. You will come back and tell us what it is?"

"Yes, and at once."

Warner and Mr. Green were indeed calling him. Among the letters in the breast-pocket of Gleason's blouse were three signed Rallston. They were reading them with eager interest when the little detective from Denver sauntered in from the rear room.

"This—a—gauntlet, lieutenant, was lying with some other things on top of the bureau. Were you going to pack it in the trunk?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Well, a single right-hand glove won't be of much use to the relatives of the deceased, especially an old worn one like this. Where's the mate?"

"I don't remember seeing one."

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"Well, you soldiers don't generally keep one glove without the other. Where was this before you put it with the things?"

"I picked it off the floor near the head of the bed."

"And there wasn't another thereabouts?"

"I saw none."

The detective went back to his work, and the officers with Mr. Green to the letters. When they had read them through to the end, Blake arose.

"You will admit, Mr. Warner, that I have excellent reason for asking and expecting permission to rejoin my incarcerated friend now," said he, with sarcastic emphasis. "If *that* doesn't knock the court-martial charges cold as a wedge, what will?"

"I never fully believed Mr. Ray guilty of those charges, Blake, and you know it. I must see the colonel, of course, and show him these letters."

"Pardon me, Mr. Warner," said the lawyer. "Tell him of them if you see fit, but as Mr. Ray's legal adviser I do not propose to let such important evidence for the defence fall into the hands of the prosecution." (Warner flushed hotly.) "I do not refer to you, my dear sir, but to your commanding officer, who is understood to have worked up the case against my client, and will naturally feel chagrined to find what liars his witnesses were. Human nature, sir; human nature."

"No, Warner, I don't mean you either,—in that case, that is," said Blake, all excitement over the late discoveries; "but these are *ours*, and by gad! we mean to hold them. Whoop! *Fiat justitia*, rue it, Whaling's! Go and tell your distinguished chief that I will be pleased to know whether he has considered my ap-

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plication yet. Here! Hold on, Warner. D—n it all, man! I'm unpardonable for mixing you and him up in the matter. Forgive me, but I'm all unstrung these last few days. If you fellows only knew Ray as we do there wouldn't have been this trouble."

And they shook hands, and Warner went off to see his chief, and had a quick conversation with him that brought the blood to the usually colorless face of the well-preserved veteran. The colonel arose hastily and said he would go with them. *He* wanted to see those letters, and he did, and looked strangely perturbed as they were read to him, and then Blake again preferred his request for permission to visit town and to remain all night. The colonel hemmed and hawed. These papers, of course, had an important bearing on the case as it originally stood before the court-martial as ordered, but matters had changed materially. "Mr. Ray is now on trial for his life, you see, and before, he was only on trial for—a——"

"Only for his honor," put in Blake, at the instant. "Very true, colonel, only for his honor, and we have a singular fashion in our regiment of looking upon the one as quite as important as the other."

The colonel was wrathy. He was essentially what is called an office soldier. He had regulations and papers at his fingers' ends; his whole army existence had been spent in the preservation of his health and the cultivation of the peaceful branches of his art. No one ever heard of his shooting, riding, hunting, or taking a risk of any kind. His habits were methodical as those of the office clock, and his one dissipation was the billiard-table. His theory of success was

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founded on common sense: Take care of your health, avoid dissipation, shun any and all danger, volunteer for nothing, do only what you are compelled to do, shift all possible work on somebody else's shoulders, preserve a purely negative record, and—you are bound to rise to the highest grades in the army. It must be admitted that the laws of promotion are admirably calculated to foster just such a line of argument, and that Whaling's "head was level." Now, though wrathy at Blake, he saw at once that he had been egregiously deceived as to the evidence to be given by Rallston on the pending court; it was better policy to avoid all that might look like persecution of Ray or Ray's friends; he gave a moment of thought to the matter, and then said,—

"You may go, Mr. Blake, because I desire you and your regiment to understand that I have no wish to obtrude my ideas of discipline upon you at such a time. At any other I would not have overlooked your misconduct."

"At any other time, sir, it probably would not have occurred," said Blake, still hotly; but the entrance of the detective put an end to the talk. He still carried the gauntlet in his hand.

"There is no mate to this in that room. What is more, this glove never belonged to Lieutenant Gleason; it is four sizes too small for him. What officer or soldier ever wore one like that?" he asked.

It was a worn and rein-soiled gauntlet, originally of white wash-leather, finely stitched in silk, and with a cuff or gauntlet heavily stiffened with leather inside; and this cuff instead of being joined was slashed from wrist to end on the under side, and three little buttons

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and straps were used to fasten it snugly to the arm after being slipped over the hand. It was utterly unlike any gauntlet in use in the United States cavalry at the time; it was utterly unlike those for sale in the stores of Cheyenne. Blake examined it curiously, but could remember none that resembled it. Leaving the others examining the glove, he walked up the row.

Mrs. Stannard and Marion both came down. The mere sight of his face brought eagerness and hope into their eyes. It was to be observed at this juncture that Mrs. Stannard's arm was around that slender waist. The symptom has no significance, of course, among school-girls or womanhood in general, but it meant a good deal where either one of these women was concerned, and Blake knew it.

"What wouldn't I give if the major were only here!" he exclaimed, impetuously. "There are three letters from Rallston there with a lot of others, showing clearly what a conspiracy had been worked up against Ray by that—by Gleason. The last one was written in Denver only two days before—only three days ago, and it shows that he had completely gone back on Gleason, and accuses him of all manner of blackguardly work. He *had* some conscience after all, for he swears he never thought Gleason would use what he told him to get Ray into trouble. He was mad because Ray wouldn't pass his horses. Oh, it breaks up the whole business! Green thinks he should be secured at once, and is going to have the detectives after him the moment we can telegraph. Whew! Excuse me, ladies, but I'm warm!" And Blake leaned limply against the railing and mopped his brow.

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"Mr. Blake, have you eaten a thing to-day?" asked Mrs. Stannard. "Do come in and let me get you a sandwich and a glass of wine."

"Not a morsel! I want to hurry back to town to hug Billy. I'm only waiting for Green. He tells me that everything can be arranged so that Ray shall stay where I left him,—in a comfortable room in the jailor's home instead of where that old bag of skin and bones thought he'd get him." And he vengefully shook his fist at the colonel, who was returning homeward to tell his wife the wonderful tidings of the discoveries in Gleason's pockets. Mrs. Stannard had not smiled for two entire days, but Blake's reviving spirits and the welcome news combined to bring back the sunshine to her tired face. Marion, too, though listening in silence to what was said, clung closer to her friend, and looked up with thanksgiving in her eyes. Just then the lawyer and the little detective came, talking earnestly together, up the row, and, naturally, all three studied their looks and gestures with eager attention.

"That little Denverite is on a scent," said Blake in a low tone; "he has been hunting high and low for a mate to a peculiar gauntlet that was found there. He says Gleason could never have owned it."

"A gauntlet? What was it like?" asked Miss Sanford, with a start.

"Like nothing we wear, that I ever saw. It's old and worn, but was a handsome glove once."

"Mr. Blake, I—I want to see it! ask him if I may." And she stepped eagerly forward, her blue eyes dilating, her whole frame tremulous.

Blake sprang from the railing, and was by the detec-

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tive's side in three long strides. At the whispered words he spoke both the lawyer and the detective glanced quickly and keenly at the ladies: the former took off his hat to them, the latter seemed to hesitate for a moment, then stepping forward, he courteously bowed, took the gauntlet from an inner pocket, and handed it to her. The instant she caught sight of it she shuddered and shrank, though an eager, triumphant light shot into her eyes; then, as though by an effort, she overcame the horror and repugnance that had seized her, took it as she might a frog or worm, between thumb and forefinger, and darted into the house, leaving all but Mrs. Stannard petrified with amaze. "Never fear," said Mrs. Stannard. "I know where she has taken it. She will be back in a moment."

Up the stairs she flew and into the front room, where Mrs. Truscott sat by the window in a low rocking-chair.

"Grace Truscott! Look at this. *Don't* touch it! Look at those fastenings—those buttons. Who was the only person you ever saw wear a glove like that?"

"Sergeant Wolf, Marion. Where—how?"

But she was gone like a flash. Down the stairs again, her feet twinkling like magic, out in the free air among them all, her heart bounding, her blue eyes blazing, her color vivid, brilliant.

"Take it!" she cried. "Take it! The man who murdered him, the man who wore that glove, was Wolf, the deserter."

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CHAPTER XXVI.

REVELATIONS.

When Colonel Rand arrived from Omaha the next afternoon, and Blake met him at the depot, he found that there was less for him to do than he imagined. He had known Ray well for many years of his army life, had served with him in Arizona, and was one of his stanchest friends. He was wild with enthusiasm when Truscott's despatch was received, telling of Wayne's rescue and Ray's heroic conduct, and he was furious over the tidings that his gallant friend had been placed in arrest on charges that had not been investigated at department headquarters, or by anybody who could represent Ray's interests. Even before the telegrams came in from the regiment protesting against Ray's trial in their absence, he had started for Kansas City armed with a copy of the charges and specifications, had easily determined that the civilians cited as witnesses were men who really knew little or nothing, but had only a vague, "hearsay" idea of matters, which vigorous cross-questioning developed that they had mainly derived from letters or talks of Gleason's, or had got from Rallston himself, who, said they, was riled because he couldn't play off a lot of broken-down mustangs for sound horses on that board. No one could swear that he had seen Ray drink; no one could swear he had played any game for any stake; no one could

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testify to a single act of his that was in the faintest degree unofficerlike or unbecoming a gentleman. Indeed, even the cads with whom Gleason consorted seemed to have become inspired with contempt. And Rand went back to Omaha satisfied that the charges were all conspiracy. But Rallston had kept out of his way. He could not reach him. No one knew where he was. Some went so far as to say he was ashamed of having been mixed up with Gleason in such a low piece of business. Even Mrs. Rallston at Omaha could tell nothing of her husband's whereabouts, and was in great distress over the letters from her brother announcing the trouble in which he was enveloped, all on account of Rallston's rascality as she felt, though he would not say. Then came the fearful news that Gleason was murdered by her brother, and the next day she had sold one of the beautiful solitaires that Rallston had given her in the days when he was a dashing wooer, and on the same train with Colonel Rand she hastened to Cheyenne. Blake was presented to her as she alighted from the cars, and conducted her to the parlor of the hotel, where in few words he told them of the discovery of Rallston's letters in the dead man's pockets, and of Wolf's gauntlet in the dead man's room. The detectives had urged that nothing should be revealed in this last matter, as every effort was now being made to capture the ex-sergeant, and that little man from Denver had already a reply from his chief, saying that Rallston was there and could be produced at any time. Poor Mrs. Rallston! She winced at the professional technicalities, but wrote a hurried despatch, care of the Rocky Mountain Dectective Agency, enjoining him to

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come to them at once; breathing no word of reproach or blame, but telling him that his letters were now in Ray's hands, and they felt that he bitterly regretted the part he had taken in connection with Gleason. He must come and exonerate her brother from the charge of accepting a bribe, to which he was assigned as the sole witness.

There was a further conference that need not be detailed. Colonel Rand desired first to see some of the prominent business men whom he knew, as he proposed to have Ray bailed out instanter no matter what that young gentleman's wishes might be, and Blake, giving her his arm, escorted Mrs. Rallston through the bustling streets until they reached the jail. Even then there was a little knot of hangers-on watching with wolfish curiosity every comer. The officials touched their hats to Blake and his veiled companion, and looked admiringly at her tall, graceful form. Already something was beginning to whisper that justice had been blinder than ever, had been groping painfully in the dark, and had nabbed the wrong man. Mr. Perkins and his jury had been basely and ungratefully alluded to as a batch of leather heads, and it behooved the sheriffs and others to look to the buttered side of their bread, lest it, too, should fall in the municipal mud. Blake felt her trembling as they passed through the office into a long and dimly-lighted hall.

"Courage, Mrs. Rallston," he whispered. "We are going to lose him, you and I, but it's to a very different captivity. Oh, he's gone *this* time past all saving. Just wait till you see her!" And before she could ask one question in her wonderment, a door was opened,

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because they concern others more than they do me. As you have seen, suspicion is already pointing to Sergeant Wolf. I have connected him with the murder from the first. The detective has ascertained beyond doubt that that was his glove; that a horse *was* tied at the northeast corner of the hospital yard about the time of the occurrence, and that a bandsman—the drummer—is almost certain that my pistol, which did the work, was in the sergeant's possession the night he deserted. I *know* it was: this note will prove it." And he produced from an envelope bearing the Laramie City postmark, and addressed to him at Russell, a sheet of note-paper on which, without date or signature, was written, "I had to take your pistol. Time was everything. The enclosed twenty dollars will pay." "Compare that writing," he continued, "with dozens of specimens to be found in the office at Russell, and that will settle it.

"Now, the jury could not understand why I refused to let Hogan have my pistol that night. It was because I knew it was gone, and I did not wish any one else to know it. The colonel could not understand why I would not tell the cause of Wolf's desertion. I did not wish any one to know. Everybody, I presume, wanted to know how I explained away the presence of my pistol at the scene, and that was another thing I wanted kept in the dark until—until released from a promise that involved the peace of one whom I was bound to protect. (Mrs. Rallston's eyes were dilating to twice their usual size.) As soon as notified of the decision of that jury, I wrote saying that it might soon be necessary to save my honor to reveal what I had

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kept so sacred. No answer came until—until last night; full and free release from my promise; but I believe that all may be kept sacred still. *You* will understand that I am prepared to explain these matters should the case come to trial, but not before."

Even as he was speaking there came a knock at the door: a telegram for Mr. Green. The lawyer opened and read it, thought earnestly a moment, and then left the room, saying he would soon return. It was getting dark, and Ray lighted the oil lamp that stood upon its bracket. Rand was watching his every movement, and had been quietly jotting some memoranda of his statements. As the young cavalryman returned to his seat by his sister's side and took her hand in his, the colonel remarked,—

"Ray, I thought I knew you pretty well all these years, but I believe I'm only just beginning to get acquainted with you. Blake said you had astonished him, but your capacity for taking things coolly is an unexpected trait to more than one, I fancy. Now I'm going to take Mrs. Rallston over to the hotel for tea, and then we are coming back. Tell Blake I want him to apply to his post commander for a seven days' leave to-night. I'll send it out and see that he gets it. If you won't go back to Russell he must be here with you. Ah! here he comes now!"

"Where's Green?" was the exclamation that greeted their ears as Blake bolted in, all excitement. "I want him, quick. Billy, they've got that man Wolf, and he wants to see you or somebody. He's pretty near gone and fought like a tiger, they say."

"Where is he?" asked Rand, springing to his feet.

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"Just out here at the edge of town in a blackguardly sort of dive. It's my belief they've kept him there hid ever since the night of the murder. Come, we must have Green and the sheriff. I know Ray can go with us. There'll be a carriage in a minute."

"Let me escort you to the hotel, Mrs. Rallston," said Rand, "then I can go with them. This means confirmation of our theory and the end of our troubles," he said, reassuringly. Ray, very pale and very quiet, kissed her good-night and saw her to the hall, promising to send for her as soon as was possible. Then, as for a moment he was left alone, he took from an inner pocket a crumpled little note that Blake had brought him the previous evening, read it lingeringly, though with eyes that softened and glowed with a light that no one yet had seen, and when he had finished he stood there gazing at the signature and the few words with which the note was concluded:

"Believe me, dear Mr. Ray, she never for an instant thought you guilty. And now good-night. I shall pray God to watch over and cheer you. *Need* I tell you that your trouble has made me only the more

"Loyally your friend, MARION SANFORD."

Oh, Ray! Ray! Here was strength and cheer and comfort for twenty men. No wonder you could bear the slings and arrows of your outrageous fortune with that charming endorsement! No wonder people thought you changed! What would people think—or rather what would they say if they knew of that letter and its very comforting conclusion? What will be said of

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our heroine, Marion, when these damaging particulars are brought to light? What *would* the girls at Madame Reichard's have said? though they knew she had a romantic streak in her, and was a worshipper of heroes? What will the cold and unsympathetic and critical reader remark of the unmaidenly lack of reserve which prompted those last few lines? What will Marion herself say when she hears of them as thus ruthlessly dragged to the bar of public opinion? Poor Marion! Her cheeks will redden, her eyes flash and suffuse, her heart beat like a trip-hammer, her white teeth set, her soft lips will firmly close. She will be annoyed. She *may* admit that in cold blood—under any other circumstances—she would never have so committed herself, and that nothing but the thought of the wrongs and sorrows and sufferings that had been heaped one after another upon the undeserving head of that luckiest of young Kentuckians would ever have betrayed her into such an outburst of sentiment. She may admit what indeed was the truth, that she wrote the whole thing after a vehement interview with Grace, at a time when she thought she saw her gallant friend dragged off to jail, believing he had been denied by those whom he was actually suffering to shield. She may say that, had there been time, she would have less pointedly worded the closing sentence. But of one thing you may be certain,—once and for all,—she said just what she thought, and now—against the opinion of the whole world if need be—she will stand by those words through thick and thin,—she will never retract.

And as for Ray: he gazed upon them as he might upon a heaven-inspired message from a better world;

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he bowed his head and kissed, reverently, humbly, prayerfully, the sweet and thrilling words; and then, and then—he bent his knee and bowed his head, and with deeper reverence, with humility such as he had never known before, with a prayer that came from the depths of his loyal heart, he thanked God for the infinite blessing that had come to him through the darkness of his bitter trials; he rose calm, strengthened, steadfast, as he heard the rapidly-approaching footsteps of his friends.

Less than half an hour thereafter a little group sat in silence around a rude bed in a darkened room. Outside, sullen and scowling, two rough-looking men, the owners of the establishment, were guarded by the officers of the law, while within, Ray, Blake, Mr. Green, the sheriff, and an officer of the territorial court were listening to the dying deposition of the Saxon soldier Wolf,—the physicians had declared it impossible for him to live another day.

Late on the night of the murder three men, returning townwards from the "house on the hill," had come suddenly upon a gray horse dragging a man by the stirrup. They picked the man up and carried him into the gambling-house at the edge of town, where they laid him upon this bed. Noting the U. S. on the shoulder of the horse and his cavalry equipments, they sent him away in charge of one of their number, and proceeded to search the pockets of the still insensible soldier, who was clad in comparatively new "ranchman's" clothing, and who wore a gauntlet on his left hand. He had revived for a moment, was told that he was among friends and had nothing to fear. He said his horse

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had stumbled into an *acequia* in the darkness and fallen on him, and now he wanted to get up. They assured him no horse was there; that, finding him insensible, they had carried him to this place, where he was all right "if he kept quiet," and Wolf soon realized that he was in a notorious "dive" where soldiers were often drugged and robbed of their money. He was locked in that night, and though suffering intensely from internal injuries, he strove to make his escape. The next morning people in the neighborhood heard appalling cries and uproar, but such things had often happened there before in the drunken fights that took place, and not until this day had it leaked out in some way that there was a man there dying from injuries received partly in a runaway and partly in a fight in the house. The police made a raid, and there discovered the very man for whom the detectives and the military were searching high and low. His first words were to ask for Lieutenant Ray, then for a physician and a lawyer. And now his story was almost done. Ray was fully, utterly exonerated.

In brief, it was about as follows: He was mad with rage at the treatment he had received at the hands of Lieutenant Gleason, and at a deed of his which he would not detail,—Lieutenant Ray knew, and that was enough. He himself had only one thought,—to follow at once on the trail, to find him alone if possible, and to compel him to fight him as gentlemen fought, *à outrance*, in the old country. He took Ray's pistol, and after getting some papers and some clothing he needed from the band barracks, he went to the stables, raised the shutter, and crept into the window of the stall

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which held his horse, led him noiselessly out over the earthen floor to the rear entrance, which was easily opened from the inside, and long before dawn was on the road to Fetterman, in pursuit of the stage. He had no fear of ranch people betraying him as a deserter. They knew nothing but what he was carrying despatches. He had received plenty of money but a short time before through friends in Dresden; he hoped to secure fresh horses, and overtake the stage before it reached a ranch where they stopped for meals several hours south of Fetterman. His plan was wild and impracticable, enough to throw doubts on his sanity, but he only thought of revenge, he said; he was determined to waylay Gleason and force him to fight. But his plan failed. His horse gave out long before he could get another; he left him at a cattle ranch finally, and went ahead on a borrowed "plug," but to no purpose. Gleason reached Fetterman ahead of him, and by the time he neared there he knew that his desertion had been telegraphed. Still he thought to follow as a scout or teamster, and bought rough canvas and woolen clothing; hung around the neighborhood, but avoided all soldiers; learned of Gleason's going with Webb, and actually crossed the Platte and followed on their trail, until he met him coming back at the head of the little escort. Keeping his eager lookout far ahead, he had easily hidden himself and his horse where he could watch them as they went by, and had recognized his victim, turned on his tracks, and once more trailed him back; had lost him and followed the wrong "buckboard" from Fetterman, and had gone towards Rock Creek before he found out that Gleason

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went by way of Fort Laramie. A countryman going in to Laramie City had taken, some days previous, the note with its enclosure to Ray,—he could not steal, he said, and at last, having recovered his horse, he returned by night to Cheyenne, easily learned of Lieutenant Gleason's presence at Russell, and that very night rode out across the prairie, tied his gray to a post near the north-east corner of the hospital enclosure, and stole to Gleason's back-yard. Not for an instant had he ever flinched in his purpose. He knew the lieutenant was officer of the day, and that he would be out to visit his sentries after midnight; but it occurred to him he would have no weapon but the sabre, and he meant to offer him fair fight. A light was burning in the rear room. He peeped through the blinds and saw him undressing as though to go to bed. He could wait no longer. He opened the kitchen door, which Shea had left unlocked, entered the house, and rapped at Gleason's door. The lieutenant supposed it to be Shea, probably, and opened it himself. "Behold the man you have outraged, I said. I give you one instant only to get your pistol. We fight here to the death. He sprang back, still facing me; he was livid with fear; he called for help, help! he ordered me to leave, he was a craven and would not fight; he called louder, and then I fired; he gave a scream and fell towards me on his face. I had hurled my gauntlet at him as I challenged, but there was no time to pick it up. I turned and fled. Some one seized me at the back gate, but I hurled him aside and ran on tiptoe to my horse. I heard voices coming, but no one could hear me. I led my horse some distance; then mounted and galloped madly this way. Near

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town he stumbled, fell, and rolled on me, and I knew no more till I heard them say he was dead and that the Herr Lieutenant had killed him. Then I strove to escape, and we had a fearful fight. They overcame and drugged me, I think, but again I came to, and begged to be let to see you. They keep me for the reward, perhaps, but they see me dying, and the police come at last."

In the solemn hush of the darkened room, far from the land where he had been known and loved, where doubtless his gifts had been valued, and his life, until wrecked by that duel, was honored, the Saxon soldier lay breathing his last. Mad or sane, there was no one there to rightly judge. The one trait that shone to the end was the strong love of the profession which he could have adorned so well. His glazing eyes looked wistfully into Ray's pale face; his tremulous hand sought that of the young officer, who knelt there by his side; in faint, broken accents he spoke his last earthly plea:

"I was a gentleman once, Herr Lieutenant. I am soldier—even now. You are the soldier the men all love. May I not take your hand?"

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CHAPTER XXVII.

VINDICATED.

LIFE at Russell had lost for the time being so much of its customary gayety as to warrant Mrs. Turner's discontented descriptive of "poky." With all but three or four officers absent on campaign; without even letters or news from them; with Mr. Gleason's tragic fate and Mr. Ray's romantic and mysterious connection therewith, there was too much of solemn and shudder-inspiring element in the daily talk to render conversation at all cheerful. All sorts of odd things had happened since the death of that deserter, Wolf, and Mrs. Turner was at her wit's end to make her conclusions fit together. She had by no means ceased to jump,—that saltatory satisfaction at least remained to her,—but she missed the mark so often as to seriously impair, for a while at least, her confidence in her theories, and nothing but a series of serious shocks could have achieved that result. She, too, had her sorrows, poor lady, for her regimental companions in number eleven had shunned her society to such an extent as to set the whole garrison talking about it, though it took very little to accomplish that.

To begin with, Mrs. Truscott rarely went out at all, and had denied herself to visitors on many occasions. Mrs. Stannard and Marion were all the companions she cared to see much of, though, to Mrs. Turner's incredu-

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lous wrath, Mrs. Wilkins was admitted on the very days when she, herself, had called and penetrated no farther than the parlor. Mrs. Wilkins had enjoyed—we use the term advisedly—a furious quarrel with the wife of the commanding officer, and had driven that exemplary and forgiving woman from the field in utter dismay. There had been no love lost between them from the first, but Mrs. Wilkins had hotly resented Mrs. Whaling's lamentations over Ray's prospective conviction and his undeniable guilt, and had given the venerable black silk a dusting the very day that Ray was carried off to prison. Then came the electrifying intelligence that Wolf's dying confession had completely exonerated Ray, and both Mrs. Whaling and Mrs. Turner had flown to Mrs. Stannard to assure her that neither one of them could have believed in his guilt had it not been for the other. Mrs. Whaling was positive that she had never spoken of him except in the love and charity she would have used towards her own son, and nothing but Mrs. Turner's accounts of his wildness and dissipation would have shaken her faith in him for a moment. She had always admired his frank and fearless character, and so had "the general," who was heart-broken to think he had been so outrageously imposed upon by Ray's enemies. Mrs. Turner vowed that she had really loved Mr. Ray like a brother, but that Mrs. Whaling had told her of the positive evidence the general had against him, and so what could she think? Mrs. Stannard listened to both with uncompromising and decidedly chilling silence, and each withdrew discomfited.

Colonel Rand spent much of the morning after

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Wolf's revelation in overhauling papers with Colonel Whaling, but his visit to the ladies at number eleven was of unusual length and cordiality. He left only in time to see Ray and Blake a few moments in town before taking the eastern train. It had been Mrs. Stannard's intention to drive thither to call on Mrs. Rallston, but she was too late. Mr. Green's telegraphic message from Denver had warned him that Rallston was delirious with fever, and after the rapturous interview between brother and sister that followed upon his return from Wolf's bedside, Ray had gently broken the news to her of her husband's illness, and before the coming of train time on the following day Rand had obtained telegraphic authority for him to escort her to, and remain with her in, Denver. His release by the civil authorities would have had about it something of the nature of an ovation, when at noon on that day the full details of Wolf's confession were "spread upon the records," but by ingeniously circulating the story that he would return to the fort at sunset, Blake managed to throw the public off the track. His arrest was suspended by the telegram from division headquarters. Rand was ordered to come thither at once with his documentary proofs of the falsity of the charges against Ray, and the latter went quietly off to Denver with a ten days' leave, conducting his sister to her husband's bedside. He saw no one at Russell before going, but we have reason to believe that the plethoric missive he sent to Mrs. Stannard derived much of its bulk from an enclosure that was not meant for her eyes at all, and Blake went back to Russell to the lionizing he deserved.

But the gloom at the garrison was dispelled perforce

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by the arrival of troop after troop, company after company, from east, west, and south, fast as cars could carry them,—all bound for the Black Hills to meet and support Crook, who was reported fighting his way southward through unknown regions and unknown numbers of the red men. Nothing had been heard even by telegraph from the —th from any source whatever since the steamer came down to Bismarck with sick and wounded, and the news that they had pushed out again for the Little Missouri country the last of August, and here it was beyond mid September. A whole regiment of cavalry encamped for a day or two on the prairie, then marched northward. Natty artillerymen from San Francisco dropped in to pay their respects on their way to "the Hills;" not a day passed without the arrival of strange officers, scores of men, and squadrons of horses. Russell had suddenly blossomed into first rank as a great supply depot, and in all the excitement of greeting the new-comers, and sending messages and missives to the dear ones at the front, the pall of tragedy was lifted from the post. Gleason and Wolf were, alike, wellnigh forgotten.

And then with sudden thrill the news tore through the post, and flashed over the wires in every direction, that a courier had ridden down from the northern limits of the hills bringing despatches from Crook, and announcing that, though half starved, ragged, and practically dismounted, the followers of the Gray Fox had reached the Belle Fourche, and would soon be able to push on to the agencies. They had dashed upon the Sioux villages at Slim Buttes, capturing hundreds of their fat ponies (and greedily eating many of them that

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very night), had found the lodges crammed with the spoil of the Custer battle, had killed several warriors and burned every ounce of Indian stores or provisions they could not use, and had two days' ringing, spirited fighting with Crazy Horse and his charging hosts among the fog wreaths and dripping crags of those strange, picturesque upheavals; then burying their dead and bringing away their wounded, they were once more within reach of supplies, though it might be weeks before they could come home. "Another battle and we not there," was Blake's sympathetic despatch to Ray at Denver; but now the last seemed to be recorded. Another week and letters might be expected. Another fortnight and it was known that all the forces were concentrating at Red Cloud to disarm the disaffected bands near the agencies. And then Blake and Ray, too, had both sped northward again to join their regiment. Ray's affairs had been summarily settled in this wise.

Rallston's illness had been severe, and Ray and Nell had been constantly at his side. When the fever broke and consciousness returned, and the patient realized where he was and who were his nurses, the man's remorse and shame were something pitiable. Of him, as an impartial historian, it is difficult to write, since long association with Stannard had forcibly impressed his views as to Rallston's character. Perhaps we were as reluctant to hear of his subsequent behavior and to believe in his contrition as Mrs. Whaling with all her meek and lowly piety was to conceive of Ray's innocence of the various charges laid at his door; but, in the absence of proof to the contrary, we simply place

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before the patient reader Nellie Ray Rallston's own statement: that her husband emerged from that trying illness a very different man, that he humbly begged Will's forgiveness and hers, and that when he was well enough to be moved home he had grown so fond of Will that he could not bear to have him out of his sight, and that he was rejoiced when orders came for Will to go to Chicago, as it enabled him to travel with them as far as Omaha. But you must remember, we feel bound to say, that she was of that loyal loving Kentucky nature—singularly like her brother for that matter—that having once given itself in its entirety to the service of lover or friend, is apt to stick to it through thick and thin. We may be pardoned—we worldlings—for doubting as yet the depth and sincerity of Rallston's repentance. "When the devil was ill, the devil a saint would be," etc. You know the application; but, for the time being, Mrs. Rallston went home happier than she had been for ages.

And Ray went on to division headquarters at Chicago, wondering what on earth was up now. He was still on leave, still clamoring to be tried, that he might be cleared of those charges and allowed to rejoin his regiment. His wound had healed, though he was still thin and worn, and he could not bear to think that there might be any more fighting for the dear old —th and he not there.

But Rand had taken Rallston's letters and some other papers with him to Chicago, as directed, and the commanding general had seen in less than no time what an outrageous case had been built up against a young officer whose record up to date had been one that ap-

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pealed to all his sympathies. Ever since that daring night ride Ray had been an object of the liveliest interest to the general,—himself the cavalry leader *par excellence* of his day,—and when Rand laid before him all the papers in the case there was an eruption that made the rafters ring.

But when it came to cooling down and acting on the case, much as the general might think Ray deserved a triumphant vindication at the hands of a court, there were a dozen things to make it impracticable. To begin with, the court had been ordered before it looked so black for Crook's command and the Black Hills settlers, and all those infantry officers who were on the original detail were now plodding up to Red Cloud. The division was wellnigh stripped of everything but staff-officers, and if a court *did* meet, what a scoring it might give old Whaling and to his own staff-officer, who took all that hearsay talk down around Leavenworth and never gave Ray's friends a chance. It ended in the general's impetuously directing that the court be dissolved, and that Ray be ordered there post-haste. "I'll vindicate him!" he said.

And he did. Ray's pale, anxious face turned all sorts of colors when the general jumped up from his chair and griped his hand like a vise, and looked into his brave young eyes and said things to him that filled them with tears and his soul with confusion. Ray had no words, but his heart was full of a delight that none but soldiers know, and the lionizing he got that day at division headquarters would have spoiled many another fellow. The general could, indeed, "vindicate" him. He showed him the draft of the letters sent to the regi-

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ment, and asked with a smile if he didn't think *that* would do as well as the "not guilty" of a court; and that evening Ray took the westward train so as to stop over in Omaha one night and see Nell, and then hurry on by the Union Pacific to Cheyenne. His heart was bounding with hope, with pride, with gratitude and joy; but through it all there was a sense of something strange and new to him that tempered every feeling of exultation. He had been tried as by fire, and humbled, softened, chastened by the fierceness of the flame. Even bitterness and resentment seemed expelled from his soul. Ray was a changed, a graver man. All that was truthful, gallant, loyal in his nature was there yet, but the recklessness of the past was gone.

Many letters had come to him in the few days he had spent at Denver by Rallston's sick-bed, and while Mrs. Stannard had frequently written to tell him how they all were, and the colonel sent a courteously-worded expression of his regret at the credence he had given to the statements of a brother officer and what he termed the "misunderstandings" of the summer, Ray was most touched at Warner's "solid" and earnest appeal to be regarded as a friend and not as one of the opposition.

He answered promptly and cordially everything Mr. Warner wrote with a single exception. The young adjutant was requested by Colonel Whaling to put in a word or two for the Hibernian quartermaster whom Blake had cut dead, and who was perturbed in spirit over the prospect of being otherwise lacerated when Ray got back. Warner thought that the colonel or the quartermaster himself should make the proper *amende* in this case, but the latter was a poor hand at epistolary

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expression, and the former had long been a pronounced adherent of that "divine right of" commanding officers which makes the adjutant the transmitter and medium of all correspondence involving matters of delicate or diplomatic import. If the result be successful, all right. It was written by direction of Colonel So and So, and is presumably his own wording. If it fail, then anybody can see that failure is due solely to the clumsy and blockheaded manipulation of the adjutant.

Mr. Warner conveyed a hope that the quartermaster might be included in the general amnesty, but to this Ray made no response. He drew the line at those who had been unkind to Dandy.

And now he was hurrying back to Russell to conduct a large body of recruits and horses up to "the Hills" to meet the regiment; and a party of young officers had joined, many of them graduates of that very year's class at the Point, young fellows whom Mrs. Truscott had known well but a few months previous, when they wore the gray under Jack's tuition at squadron drill and riding-hall work. Their regiments being in the field on active campaign, they abandoned much of the leave of absence due them and hastened to report for duty. Their services were most needed in getting the recruits into shape, and here they were at Russell enthusiastic at the prospect of seeing Captain Truscott again, devoting themselves to the ladies at his army home, and eager to a man to see and know Ray, whose name was on every lip, whom every man of them envied, and who would arrive at noon on the morrow.

Mrs. Stannard's piazza was the scene of a levee this

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lovely, sunshiny autumn afternoon. She was there with Miss Sanford and Mrs. Truscott, who was reclining in a comfortable wicker chair, and vastly enjoying the sunshine, the bracing air, and above all the merry chat of these young troopers, and envying them their northward march. Would they not be with Jack in a fortnight? Half a dozen of the "boys" were flocking around the ladies, and Blake was there sprawling over the railing as was his wont, and convulsing the assemblage every now and then with his outrageous travesties and declamatory outbursts. Blake was in the wildest possible spirits. He was bubbling over with fun and the milk of human kindness, except for that poor devil of a quartermaster, at whom he scowled diabolically whenever they met. He had forgiven Mrs. Turner, who was quick to see where the "gang" had gathered that afternoon, and was early on hand to lure the new victims. Already she was making a deep impression on Mr. Corry, who was gazetted to her husband's troop, and was fetching him farther into the meshes with every glance of her eyes. And then came Mrs. Whaling, whom Blake hastened to meet, and with elaborate genuflexions to usher into the circle, where she was speedily seated and regaling the company with her views on the chances of the campaign. It being the ardent desire of every cavalry lady in garrison that the —th should be ordered thither for winter quarters, Mrs. Whaling was full of information which "the general" had received from confidential sources going to prove that a great infantry post was to be established there, which he would command, while the cavalry remained in the Hills until spring. Blake noted the

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silence among the young officers and the anxious look in Mrs. Truscott's face (Mrs. Stannard had long since ceased to be influenced by Mrs. Whaling's statements), and he determined on a diversion. He felt morally certain that the only "confidential" communication the veteran post commander had received from any superior in a week was the stinging rap from division headquarters anent the bungle he had made in Ray's affair, and on general principles he felt that he couldn't let an opportunity slip.

"Oh, come now, Mrs. Whaling, don't crush all the hopes we had of spending the winter with you here. 'Lady, you are the cruellest she alive' if you will lead us to believe such ill report, and here we were all rejoicing that Ray comes to-morrow."

"Oh! Mr. Ray, to be sure! and how delightful it is to think that he has justified all our confidence in him! He returns like—a—the Bayard of old; the *chevalier sans peur et—et——*"

"*Sans culotte?*" suggested Blake.

"Ah, yes; thanks! Mr. Blake. As though I *could* have forgotten it for a moment! Quite like the chevalier *sans peur et sans culotte.* Such a knightly fellow as he always was!"

"Oh, Lord, yes! *All* nightly, especially when the luck ran his way."

"Now, Mr. Blake, how you distort my meaning!"

"Madame, you do me wrong, notorious wrong! I did but echo the words you spake a week agone. You marvel at my meaning. Nay, then, 'tis not less strange and weird than the tongue in which you tell of his perfections; less *bizarre*, if you *will* have French."

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"Mr. Blake, you tilt at wind-mills." ("Gad. that's neat!" quoth he, *sotto voce.*) "I never said anything about a bazaar, though that reminds me that every one of you gentlemen should go to town and do something for the church before you leave. The fair has been going on two days now, and not one of you has spent a cent there. And they so need an organ——"

"Mrs. Whaling, tell them to have Jarley's wax-works, and you'll be Mrs. Jarley—or Mrs. Partington; I'll be John or Ike,—I don't care which,—and their fortune's made," said Blake, shaking with laughter; so, too, was Mrs. Stannard behind the palm-leaf fan which concealed, at least, her face. Miss Sanford, biting her lips, looked reproachfully at Blake, and Mrs. Truscott hid her face in her hands.

"Now, *Mr.* Blake!" protested Mrs. Turner, "you never have been in town to church since your coming here, and it's shocking the way you officers neglect it. I'm sure I've offered to drive you in with me a dozen times."

"True, fair lady; but those eminently safe animals of yours take an hour to traverse the intermediate league. I have to get up too early."

"But Mr. Ray went once; though, to be sure, Miss Sanford and Mrs. Stannard brought that about."

"Oh, yes! and came home sold. He never would have gone only he heard that the text was to be from the Sermon on the Mount, and he thought it was some new wrinkle in cavalry tactics."

"Mr. Blake, you are simply outrageous!" "Wretch!" "Shocking!" and a volley of like exclamations greeted

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this outburst. Mrs. Stannard rose from her chair and shook her fan at him.

"You shall not teach so irreverent a doctrine here! Mr. Ray went gladly, and was far more devout and reverential in church than some of the ladies."

"Any man could be devout sitting next to Miss Sanford," he persisted; but seeing no sign of levity in her face, and that her blue eyes were bent upon him "in pity rather than anger," he abruptly changed his tone to one of melo-dramatic gravity.

> "'Lady Clara Vere de Vere,
> I cannot stand and face thy frown.'

I'm not appreciated. I must betake myself to other fields. Ladies, when I get in a gale it takes something sterner than feminine rebuke to stop me. I'll away and see Mrs. Wilkins. She likes it. If aught I've said to wound thee," he continued, bowing with hand on his heart in front of Miss Sanford, "remember, Miss De Vere, in the words of your favorite Tennyson,—

> 'The cold upon your old stone gates,
> Is not more lyin' to you than I.'"

"Did you ever know such a rattlepate?" exclaimed Mrs. Turner, as the long legs went striding down the row, and the young officers sat gazing after him in wonderment.

"Never," replied Mrs. Stannard; "and yet he has as true a heart and as tender a nature as almost any man I know. There was no fun in him while Mr. Ray was in trouble; and no more devoted and loyal

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friend could he find. I *like* Mr. Blake, and always have liked him."

But Mrs. Whaling shook her head. "No right-principled young man could speak so lightly of sacred things. Ah! here comes the orderly with the mail." And as she spoke the trim young soldier entered the gate carrying his budget of letters. Mrs. Whaling stretched forth her hand to take the packet.

"Please, ma'am," said he, "I left yours at the colonel's, and my orders is not to give the others to anybody but them as they belongs to."

"I will distribute them here, orderly," she replied, with a superior smile, "as I know all these ladies and gentlemen and you do not." She was determined to see who received letters and from whom, if a possible thing, and she carried her point. Most of them were for the officers. Nothing came as yet from the regiment. Mrs. Truscott received two or three letters from the East, which were not handed her until the self-appointed postmistress had scrutinized the superscriptions; so, too, she inspected the bills and billets that came to the young subs, and two letters for Miss Sanford,—one from New York, the other, addressed in a bold, vigorous hand, was from Headquarters, Division of the Missouri, Chicago. At this, through

"All her autumn tresses falsely brown,"

she shot sidelong daggers, indeed, as she passed it with significant smile.

"I thought he'd write even though to-morrow would bring him here himself," she said; and Miss Sanford bit her lip and colored far more in indignation than in

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confusion; but, rallying like the little heroine she was, and bent now on baffling the schemes of the wily interloper, she quickly leaned forward and took the letter, glanced brightly at Mrs. Stannard, and exclaimed, with all the delight and *naïveté* of genuine surprise,—

"Why, it *is* for me, Mrs. Stannard! Now you shall not see a line of it, for you would not show me yours." And then with provoking coolness, while Grace gasped in admiration and astonishment, Marion opened and read with beaming smile her letter from Ray,—the only one he had time to write in Chicago.

It was very brief, yet when 'twas finished she wished, with all her heart, she could escape to her own room and read it once again, all by herself. It was the first letter—in the least like it—she ever received. It made her pulses bound, and it put her mettle to the test to turn at once to conversation with the one youth who had received no letter. It made her long for stable-call to sound that she might be alone and read it again and again, and yet it was very, very simple and direct. The trumpets rang their signal soon enough. The young cavalrymen doffed their caps and scurried away. Mrs. Stannard, smiling knowingly, said she would take a walk with Mrs. Turner, and then the two school friends were left alone.

"Maidie, what does he say?"

"Let me read it quietly, Grace dear. I *couldn't* there."

She had not seen him since sending that very, very outspoken letter the afternoon after he was taken to Cheyenne, and the letter he had written in answer to that was full of gratitude for her faith in him,—full

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of assurance that with such words as those to cheer him he would bear his further trials as became a man, but, until fully vindicated of every charge, he would not return to Russell and could not hope to see her; but, once freed from the odium of any and every allegation affecting his integrity, he should come to thank her in person for the strength and comfort her beautiful letter had given him.

And now—he was coming. He could not wait for his own arrival, since he had to stop over one day. The instant he left the general's presence he had asked for a desk in the aide-de-camp's room, had penned a few hasty lines to her first of all, had hurried with them to the Rock Island Depot, only a few squares away, that they might catch the mail just starting, and she—she who had proved so gallantly her faith in him, be the first to know of his complete vindication. Ray never wrote such a letter in his life before:

"Only thirty minutes before the westward mail starts, and this moment I have come unnerved and weak from the presence of the general with the fullest vindication man could ask. In the first glow of thankfulness my thoughts turn instantly to you. May God bless you for the words that came to bless me in my darkest hours! May He teach me to show you—I can never tell it—the infinite value of your words to me! May He so guide my future that, henceforth, my life shall prove worthy the trust you placed in me! Until it has, in some measure, so redeemed the past, I may not say more. Only this: you, before all the world, I desire to know of my acquittal of every allegation. To-

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morrow I shall hope to see you before we march, for I shall go at once to the regiment. There may be little opportunity for words even if I dared trust myself to speak. Last time, in laughing talk, it was agreed that I should wear your colors; but now, even your will would be powerless to prevent me, for my heart and soul are pledged to them forever.

"WILLIAM P. RAY."

Nor did he mean to "say more" when writing that letter. He meant that she—he did not care *who* else—should know that the thought of her friendship and faith had been his mainstay in the troubles which had so suddenly involved his life and wellnigh wrecked him. He wanted her to know, and he did not care who knew, that from this time forth he was her knight, sworn to her service, and bound to her by a tie he could not break if he would. Seldom as they had met, there had been from the first a halo of romance about their association, and she had come to be, even before he could realize it, the one fair woman in whom was centred the fealty and devotion of his loyal nature. He dare not hope: he would not expect that one like her could so soon, so unsought, unwooed, have learned to look upon him as anything more than a friend whose loyalty to Grace, her one intimate, and whose friendship for Mrs. Stannard had conspired to make him an object of interest in their daily talk. With the humility of true manhood he well knew that his name, clouded with the recklessness and debts of his past life, was not one that he dare lay at her feet; but this, too, he knew, and knew well, and would have faced the world to own

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it as fearlessly as he faced a foe: he loved her, and, as yet, could ask nothing in return.

And yet, when Blake met him at the station next day, and they drove rapidly out over the hard prairie roads, and he saw again the white peaks in the south and the sunlight dancing over the distant slopes, and the flag waving aloft over the dingy brown buildings of the post, and his heart beat with eager joy at thought of seeing her again, of touching that soft white hand and looking down into the depths of her clear, truthful eyes, and studying the face that, lovely always, had grown exquisite in beauty to him, he wondered how he could meet her, how he *could* speak to her, and control the longing to implore her to overlook his past life with its follies and its sins, and let him prove to her how strong and steadfast he could be if she would but bid him hope. And then he set his teeth and tossed his head,—the old Ray-like gesture,—and vowed that without a single word of hope she should see how the faith of "one fair woman" had changed his whole life. He could hardly answer Blake's eager, enthusiastic talk. He could hardly hear what he was saying until he caught the words "To-morrow morning, four hundred recruits, five hundred horses, and you go in command."

So soon, then? And yet 'twas what he had prayed for. He was eager to see the dear old regiment again. He knew well how many faces of officers and men would light up in welcome at his coming. In all the misery of the past month he had almost forgotten that in July he was with them at the front. How very far away that night ride seemed,—the ride that Wayne's

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and Truscott's fellows at least had not forgotten! It made him think of Dandy, and he questioned eagerly if Dandy were still there.

"Still there? You bet he is, Billy! Hogan's heart will break if you don't say first thing that he looks better than he ever did in his life."

"Why! How is it that Hogan has him again? I don't understand."

"Why? You can't go without a horse, man, and as commanding officer of the whole crowd you would be entitled to your choice. I thought you'd rather have Dandy, and so said. You can take another if you want to; there are lots of them, and beauties. Now we're to go to Mrs. Stannard's for dinner at once. Shall we stop and knock off the dust?"

They were whirling in at the fort gate, the gate through which he had last driven a prisoner in the grasp of the law. The broad parade was covered with squads of recruits drilling busily and with knots of young officers, who looked eagerly at Blake and the dark-eyed young gentleman in gray by his side. Along the row were many of the ladies of the garrison and romping children, all of whom nodded and smiled and waved their hands as they flashed by.

"Quick, Billy," said Blake, between his set teeth. "Out with you and into the house, unless you want to be snared by Mrs. Turner. Oh, by the Lord! Here she comes, and Mrs. Whaling, too. Scoot!"

And Ray sprang from the light wagon, and lifting his hat in salute to the ladies who were hastening down the walk, he darted into the house,—into the cool, darkened rooms which he had last seen when there was

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not a spark of comfort, of hope, or love in a world of black despair. And now, here was Hogan,—all joy and welcome and delight. There lay the "swell" undress uniform, his cap and gloves and little walking switch, all in readiness on the bed, and not until he became accustomed to the dim light after the glare of the Wyoming sun, and the mists of emotion had begun to clear away, could he see that Hogan's blue-gray eyes were wet, and that he was ready to break down again with sheer ecstasy. Ray laughed, the real old, joyous, ringing laugh again, as he gripped the faithful Irishman's hand.

"Why, Hogan, old fellow. It's good to see you again; and so Dandy is here, too, is he?"

"He is, sir, and it's he that'll be glad to have you on his back again. Oh, murther! Did the lootenant tell ye how he dumped the quarthermasther in the creek? He *didn't?*——"

"Come, Billy. No time to lose. Mrs. Stannard's waiting for you. She had early dinner, as there's to be a farewell hop to-night, and I've seen the colonel and you needn't report until afterwards. Come, man," called Blake, hurrying in; and so Hogan's ecstasies were cut short, and in a few moments more Mrs. Stannard's beaming face welcomed them at the door, and both her hands were cordially clasping Ray's, and yet—somehow, drawing him in and passing him along into the little parlor, while she herself remained volubly chatting with Blake, who did not pass the portals with any rapidity at all. Ray never could realize, much less explain it, but in another moment he was standing in the little parlor, and Marion Sanford,

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lovely in her grace and beauty, lovely in her shyly welcoming smile, lovely in the soft flush that had mantled her bonny face, was slowly rising from her chair to welcome him. All she said was "Mr. Ray!" as with trembling hands he quickly seized the cool, white, plump little member that was half extended to greet him, and—he could not speak; he knew not what to say or do; he longed for the first time in his life to kneel at a woman's feet and press her hand to his lips, but that would be an unwarrantable demonstration in these conventional days. He simply bowed low, held it one lingering moment in both his,—she must have felt their eager trembling,—and then, without the kiss for which his soul was longing, reluctantly let it go and looked once into her eyes.

"Miss—Marion, I—*cannot* tell you how glad I am to see you!" Low-toned, heartfelt, eager, they were all he dare say. He meant to be true to his resolve, and to prove his worth and his gratitude by something better than words. And for once at least in his gallant debonair life, Ray was mute and at a loss in a woman's presence. He was indeed conquered,—heart and soul.

A delightful dinner they had, that little *partie carrée;* Mrs. Truscott had declined, because she said one more woman would spoil it all, and she wanted to write to Jack. And then Ray had to go and see the colonel and have a long talk with him about the big command he was to take north on the morrow, and to shake hands gravely with the embarrassed veteran, and cordially and gladly with Warner, and to welcome the dozen handsome, soldierly, enthusiastic young graduates, who came in a body to call and pay their respects

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and tell their young commander how their recruit companies were doing; and then there were a host of other affairs to attend to, and an inspection of all the five hundred horses that were to bear them northward in the morning, and afterwards the four hundred recruits who were to go to the cavalry regiments with him. And then came retreat parade, and the solemn dinner with the colonel and his amiable better half, a dinner which seemed interminable, but which was as much a duty as attending roll-call, and so it was late when he could get into full-dress uniform and go over to the hop and see her once again. Warner, lucky devil, was to be her escort, and the young officers would have taken every dance but for the waltz he found courage to ask for at dinner. How he rebelled at the idea of having to escort Mrs. Whaling! Still, it was all part of his self-imposed penance, thought he, with a grave, quiet smile, as Hogan was helping him to dress, and the strains of the dance music came floating witchingly over the parade. He had only time to see Dandy one moment, to pet and fondle him and praise his beautiful condition (to Hogan's delight), and then, just as tattoo was sounding, there came into the room the quartermaster's clerk with some papers for his signature.

"What are these?" he asked in surprise. "Requisition for forage for one private horse, the property of First Lieutenant William P. Ray, —th Cavalry. Why, man! I own no horse."

"Them's the quartermaster's orders, sir. Lieutenant Blake got permission to buy the horse. It's Dandy, sir, but he said as how it was yours, and you'd sign the

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papers directly you got back. The forage was issued on that understanding."

"Shure it's all thrue, sir," said Hogan. "Dandy was bought last week, sir, and I thought as how Mr. Blake had told you."

Ray said no word more. His eyes were filling; he signed the papers, finished dressing in silence, escorted Mrs. Whaling with entire civility, and never heard a word she said though she talked volubly every inch of the way; and once at the hop-room and he could break loose from Mrs. Turner, who seized him to upbraid him for not stopping to speak to her, and to tell him she had saved three dances expressly for him, and she had such a host of things she wanted to tell him, and she had been hearing such a host of things about him, etc., etc., he found Blake and caught him by the sleeve.

"No dodging now, Blakey. *Who* bought Dandy? Who gave him to me?"

"Well—dang it! *I* did. Haven't I a right to?"

"No, old man; and, forgive my saying it, you and I cannot afford such presents. What was he appraised at?"

"Oh, they fixed it low; because he was to be yours, you know. I got him for two hundred."

"But, Blake, you hadn't ten dollars when I went away. I know full well how much I owe you in this matter. Bless you, old man! But—the truth now. You can afford to tell me when I say I *must* know before it comes to saying good-night to her. What had Miss Sanford to do with it?"

"Everything, Billy."

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE COLORS ENTWINE.

SHE was talking brightly with a knot of half a dozen young officers, all clamoring for "extras," when, soft and sweet, the strains of "Immortellen," that loveliest of Gungl's waltzes, floated on the air, and Ray stood there before her.

"My waltz, Miss Sanford. Can I claim you in face of such an array of aspirants?"

She rested her hand on his arm, nodding blithely to the group, and calling laughingly back to them as he led her away. Then she noticed how silent he was, and for the first time looked up in his face.

"You have not been dancing, Mr. Ray?"

"No, Miss Marion; and it was a piece of selfishness in me to ask this. I have not danced since coming back from the Cheyenne, and yet—I could not go without one. Shall we try?"

Will he ever forget her as she looked that night? How gloriously deep and soft and tender were her eyes, how wavy and rippling her hair, how exquisite the delicate tints of her complexion, how rich, how lovely the warmth of her parted lips! Her dress seemed as airy, as fair as her own quiet grace. For the life of him he could not describe it, but it was the first time he had seen her in evening attire, and Marion Sanford's neck and shoulders and arms were perfect,—fair and white

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and round and lovelier than an angel's, thought Ray, as his glowing eyes looked down in rapture upon her. She had glanced up in his face as he spoke, but his eyes met hers with such uncontrollable worship in their gaze that she could not face them. His arm twined lightly about her waist, and without a further word they swung away in the long, gliding measure that seemed so perfectly in accord with the spirit of the dreamy music. She danced lightly as a fairy; "guided," as he would have said, "with the faintest touch of the rein," and he forgot the stiffness of the wounded thigh, and everything else but that, to the music of all others he fancied most (surely the leader had an unusual fit of inspiration that night), he was dancing at last with the girl whose beauty enthralled his every sense, whose loyalty to him in all his troubles had won his undying gratitude, and whom he loved, humbly 'tis true, yet thrillingly, passionately. He never saw that all over the ball-room curious eyes were watching eagerly. Hers were downcast, while his were fixed almost in adoration on her face. Sweeter, softer, dreamier rose and fell the exquisite strains. Will he ever forget the "Immortellen"? Soft ripples of her hair were drifting close to his lips. Their delicate fragrance stole over his senses like a spell. He felt the light pressure of her tiny hand upon his arm, and envied the dead gold of his shoulder-knot, when once, as they reversed and a quick turn was necessary to avoid collision with a bulkier couple, her flushing cheek had rested one instant upon it. He could not speak; a lump rose in his throat and his heart beat wildly. What could it mean? what could it mean? this strange thing Blake

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had confessed to him? She—*she* had bought Dandy to give to him? He must find words to thank her, but how could he without betraying all?

Such silence could not last. Even in the thrilling instant of an avowal the woman does not live who so far forgets herself as to be insensible to the gaze of lookers-on. Totally ignorant of the extent of his knowledge, since she had charged Blake that it was all to be kept a profound secret; thinking only of the necessity of breaking that treacherous, betraying silence, she summoned her courage, and, looking up one instant, she made some laughing allusion to the fact that Mrs. Turner would never forgive him if he left without dancing with her; and, indeed, he *must* dance with Miss Whaling, since he had dined there that evening.

"I will try. I will do anything you ask or suggest; only, Miss Marion, we march at eight to-morrow morning. Come with me to the gallery one minute. I *must* speak to you."

So after all she had only precipitated matters. He had ceased waltzing directly opposite one of the open doors, and, without waiting for reply, with the quick decision that so marked him at times, he led her, speechless, from the room, snatching up a cavalry cape from a chair, and this, as they stepped out on the low wooden piazza, he threw over her shoulders. Several other couples were promenading slowly up and down, or gazing in at the dancers. He led her rapidly past all these until they came to the end of the platform, and there, with the moonlight shining full on his eager features, Ray turned and faced his fate. She knew he was trembling; she knew his voice was low and broken and

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husky. His words had been hardly audible to her in the hop-room, but his emotion any woman could see. Oh, how white and cold and still the distant mountains shone in the pallid light! Oh, how silent, peaceful, deserted, the far-away slopes and ridges over the prairie! Oh, how faint and far and glimmering were the night lights of the stars, dimmed into nothingness by the broad, brilliant, overwhelming radiance of the Queen of Heaven! Oh, how sweet, luring, love-lighting were those witching waltz strains floating out upon the breathless air! Oh, how warm and close was the pressure of his strong arm as it held her hand upon his beating heart! Knowing—well knowing what must be coming, powerless, even if determined to check him, she bowed her sweet face, and the young soldier's surging love words broke, low, tremulous, but irresistible, upon her listening ears.

"God knows I meant to hide as yet, until my life could have shown the influence you and your blessed faith have had.—God knows I meant to have striven to show myself worthy before coming to say what now I cannot restrain; but to-night the truth came out that to you I owe my pet, my Dandy. No; let me speak," he went on, impetuously, as for one instant she raised her head as though to check him; he had seized her hand, too, and held it down there under the folds of that happy cavalry cape. "I ask nothing. I know I've no right to hope or expect anything as yet. You have blessed me infinitely beyond my deserts already; but now I could not go, I *could* not go without giving you to do with as you will the only thing on earth I have to offer,—my heart, Marion. Oh, my darling, my

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darling, don't shrink from me! Listen, sweet one. There can be no wrong, no shame in your knowing that I love you, love you beyond any power of mine to tell you. Were I to go now, after all you have done for me, and hide all this simply because I did not and could not hope you would return it,—yet, I would hang my head in shame. The man who loves as I do *must* tell it, no matter what the answer be."

And then there was a moment's silence, through which she could plainly hear the loud beating of his heart, in which she could not find words to speak, and yet there lay her hand in his, since it was powerless to check him.

"Have I startled you, Marion?" he whispered low. "Did you not read much of this in my letter?"

She looked bravely up in his eyes. Her own were full of unshed tears. Her sweet face was lovely in the pale moonlight, and as once more she saw the worship in his eyes, the flush of joy, pride,—of what else could it be?—again mantled her soft cheeks. She made no effort to withdraw her hand.

"I have no right to be startled, Mr. Ray. I could not but see something of this all in your letter, though that might have been attributed to a very unnecessary gratitude. But I would not have you think anything like—like this due to me because of my interest in all that has taken place this summer. We all thought—Mrs. Stannard and Grace and I—that you had been most outrageously wronged, and it did seem as though everything had turned against you, and I made Mr. Blake buy Dandy because that seemed the only way to save him, too, from being abused. I couldn't bear it.

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Oh, Mr. Ray, the letter did not half prepare me for all this! I *have* liked you. I *do* like you better than any man I know," she said; and now her swimming eyes were fixed full on his, and his lips were quivering in their eagerness to kiss away the tears, but he drew her no closer.

"That in itself is more than I had a right to hope, that in itself nerves me to tell you this. I go back to my duty with a stimulus and to my temptations with a safeguard I never knew before. I never have been worthy your faintest thought, much less your love."

"Mr. Ray, don't say that! I know well that no man who has been such a friend of Mrs. Stannard's, such a friend to Captain Truscott and Grace, *could* be what you paint yourself. Oh, don't think—don't think for an instant I undervalue the gift; you—you shall not speak of yourself that way! Do you think any woman who deserves a thought could fail to glory in such a name as you have won? Oh, Mr. Ray, Mr. Ray, I hardly realize that it is possible that you care for me! You, so brave and loyal and daring."

His eyes were blazing with a rapture he could not control. It was so infinitely sweet to hear her praise.

"You make me hope in spite of yourself, Marion," he murmured, with trembling eagerness. "Oh, think; look way down into your heart, and see if you cannot find one little germ of love for me,—one that I may teach to grow. Try, my darling, try. Ah, heaven! am I mad to-night?"

And now her head was drooping again and her heart beating. She felt that since it had come she could not bid him go comfortless.

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"Only within the last day or two," she whispered, "have I been thinking that—that—I've been wondering how I dared write to you as I did when you were —in Cheyenne, wondering whether—if Dandy were not yours to-day—I could find courage to say what I did to Mr. Blake. Does—that—tell you anything, Mr. Ray?"

"Marion! Marion! Oh, my darling! let me see your face."

She struggled one instant. She even hid it upon his breast, and the helmet cords made their mark upon her blushing forehead; but quickly he took her face between his strong, trembling hands, gently but firmly raised it until his eyes could drink in every lovely feature, though the fringed lids still hid from him the eyes he longed to see.

"Marion, sweet one. *Maidie!* with all my life and strength I love you. Have you not one little word for me?"

"What—must I say?" she murmured, at last, still shrouding her eyes.

"Say,—'Will, I think I love you just a little.'"

No answer. Only beating hearts, only quick-drawn breath, only the distant call of the sentry, "Half-past eleven o'clock;" only the dying strains of the "Immortellen" wafting out through the open casements.

"Try, Maidie," he whispered, eagerly. "Try before the call comes back to the guard-house. Try before the last notes of that sweet waltz die away for good and all. Try, sweet love,—'Will, I think I do.'"

A moment's pause, then—then—

"Will, I—I *know* I do."

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And the strong, straining arms clasped about her under that blessed cavalry cape, and the bonny face was hidden on his breast, and Ray's trembling lips were raining passionate kisses on that softly rippling bang, just as the last thrill of the "Immortellen" dreamed away, and the rich, ringing, soldierly voice of the sentry on number one echoed far out over the moonlit prairie the soldier watch-cry, "All's well."

What a gem of a morning was the morrow when they rode away northward! After the command had filed out of the garrison, led by the band on their placid grays, and the ladies all along the row had waved their good-byes and kissed their dainty white hands, and the children had hurrahed and shouted and rushed out among the horses' hoofs in their eagerness to have one more farewell shake of the hand from some favorite officer or man, and two or three dames and damsels had stolen away to the back rooms up-stairs, Marion Sanford stood with tear-dimmed eyes at the window, gazing far out over the prairie at the long blue column disappearing in the dust over the "divide." By her side stood Grace Truscott, twining her arms around that slender waist and clinging to her with a new and sweeter sympathy. Who, who was the cynic that wrote that even as she stood at the altar plighting her troth to the husband she had chosen, no woman yet forgave the man whom, having rejected, she knew to have consoled himself with another? Grace never for a moment admitted that Ray had been her lover in Arizona; he had been devoted to her—always—for Jack's sake; but there were those who thought

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that only a little encouragement would have tumbled Mr. Ray over head and heels in love with her in those queer old days. But all that was past. There was no doubt that Mr. Ray was desperately, deeply in love now, and that two women in that garrison—Mrs. Stannard and Mrs. Truscott—knew it well, and rejoiced that his love was requited. But, late as it was, Ray had had a very happy yet earnest talk with Marion on their return from the hop. He told her plainly that he had a term of probation to serve, and that not until he had freed himself from his burden of debt and furnished his quarters, so that he might not be utterly ashamed to welcome her to such a roof as even frontier cottages afforded, he would not ask her to be his wife; he would not ask her to consider herself even engaged to him. He had no right, he said, to speak to her of his love, much less to plead for hers; but that was irresistible,—'twas done. Long engagements are fearful strains, and our social license of questionings renders them wellnigh intolerable to men and women, who naturally shrink from speaking of matters which are to them so sacred. Ray declared that she should not be harassed by any such torturing talk and prying and questioning as that which has to be undergone by almost every girl whom civilized society fancies to be engaged. She could never doubt him for an instant, he felt assured, and he—well, he couldn't begin to realize his blessed fortune at all, so she must excuse *his* incredulity; but he declared he would leave her utterly untrammelled. There should not even be an "understanding." He would not ask her to accept his class-ring, all he had to offer, but write to her he *would*. Grace and Mrs.

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Stannard should know if she saw fit, and Truscott, but no one else at Russell. Then, if she came to her senses when she went back to New York and her friends the Zabriskies in November, and met some fellow worthy her acceptance, why—but here a little white hand was laid firmly upon his lips; he said no more, but compromised by kissing it—rapturously.

But he, and Dandy, too, had come to say good-by before marching, and Dandy's coat shone like silk, and he arched his pretty neck and looked at her with his soft brown eyes as though he wanted to tell her he knew all about it, as indeed he did. Had not Ray gone into the stable early that morning while he was crunching his oats and whispered it all, and ever so much more, into that sensitive ear? A famous confidant was Dandy on the long march that followed, for Ray used to bend down on his neck and talk about her to him time and again, to the wonderment of his "sub." Ray breakfasted at Mrs. Stannard's the morning of the start, and when he came away and it was time to mount, he wore in the button-hole of his scouting-shirt a single daisy—Marion's own flower—and a tiny speck of dark-blue ribbon. The yellow facings of the cavalry were linked with the Sanford blue.

And wasn't Blake in a gale that morning? Rattling with nonsense and misquotation and eagerness to be off, he strode from gallery to gallery with his Mexican spurs clattering at his heels. He had bought in town a little china match-safe, which he gravely presented to Mrs. Whaling as a slight addition to the collection of what she termed her brick-a-braw. He implored Mrs. Turner to sing to him just once, for

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singing was a doubtful accomplishment of hers, and she had already good reason to know that he had paraphrased one of her songs, because of her defective enunciation, into—

"Some day, some day, some day
I shall meat chew,"

and she never forgave ridicule. He declared he meant to kiss Mrs. Wilkins good-by, and dared Mrs. Stannard to come down and see him do it; but when it was really time to ride to the head of his troop of recruits, he bowed to Miss Sanford with a knowing look in his eye, and bent low over her hand.

"'Love sought is good, but given unsought is better;'

and yet, fair lady, you fail to see the overpowering advantages of accepting mine. In the language of Schillerschoppenhausen, Ich habe geliebt und gelebt, which being interpreted means, I've loved and got left. Fare ye well." And away he rode, bestriding his horse like a pair of bent dividers on a broad grin.

And Ray,—though pale from recent illness and confinement and lack of the old open air life,—never had he looked so full of hope and buoyancy and life as, after one thrilling little squeeze of her hand, he swung into saddle, doffed his broad-brimmed hat to all, and went bounding away to take his place in front of the long mounted line that awaited his coming. Then his voice rang out clear and firm and true, and with the daisy nestling in his breast he galloped to the head of column. Duty, Loyalty, and Hope were leading on before.

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Two long weeks of marching it took to carry them to the romantic valley in the Black Hills where the old —th so eagerly awaited them, and meantime letters were flying to and fro. Ray meant to bring his new riders and new horses in perfect trim to their regiments, and so made short marches and constant inspection of his stock. Heavens! what a gloom had settled over the regiment that miserable day, when one of their number, having ridden into Deadwood, came back with a several days' old Cheyenne paper giving the fearful details of Gleason's death and Ray's probable guilt. It was three days more before they met the mail-stage fairly laden down with bags of letters for them. Stannard had been almost sick, Truscott sad, silent, but incredulous. There had been a difference between him and Billings, for the latter was inclined to believe the story true, and Truscott said that he was prepared to hear this from other men in the regiment but not from him. Eager as lovers and husbands to get their mail, every man had dropped the letter he happened to be reading when young Hunter, searching a later Cheyenne paper, set up a whoop that made the pine-crested heights echo again and again. Then waving his paper and dancing like a madman, the youngster yelled at the top of his voice,—

"Ray's innocent! Ray's acquitted! 'Twas a deserter, Wolf, who did it! He's confessed. *Now*, Crane. By heaven, swallow your words! Wh-o-o-o-p!"

Officers and men, the whole regiment sprang to their feet and came tearing to the spot, and such a scene of hand-shaking and shouting and jubilee the Black Hills never knew before or since. It was easy enough for the

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officers to hurry back to their letters from wives and children or sweethearts, but for hours the men kept up their hurrah; Ray had been their hero for years, and the affair of the July fight of Wayne's command had simply intensified the feeling.

Naturally, the letters bearing the postmarks of latest dates were those first opened. Fancy the faces of Stannard and Truscott as they read, letter by letter, backward through that summer's record. Turner looked as sad and anxious as ever; almost the first one he opened said, "If you have not already seen and read those that precede this, please burn them without reading. I was mistaken;" and Turner well knew that when his wife got so far as to admit that she had been mistaken, it meant that in some way she had been playing the mischief. He never read, therefore, all her graphic details of Ray's mysterious flirtation with Mrs. Truscott, or of the thrilling evidence in Mrs. Turner's possession of his guilt. A good fellow was Turner, a loyal soldier and husband, who loved his pretty and capricious better half, and deserved a still better one.

That night when the first keen frosts of October made the camp-fires doubly welcome, old Stannard and Jack went off among the pines and built a little blaze all by themselves, and there talked gravely over the strange events of the summer now so fully set before them in those volumes from Russell. All Wolf's wild infatuation. All Gleason's cunning malice, and—ah! *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.* May God forgive him! All Ray's loyal and devoted services, and his cruel suffering and wrongs. What wonder was it that for days the regiment could talk of nothing but Ray? What

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wonder that they could not fathom the secret of the tie that made Stannard and Truscott inseparable now? What wonder that those two officers obtained permission to ride forward a day's march and meet Ray and his command, and that when they came upon him cantering gayly up through Buffalo Gap, he hardly knew them, so gaunt, worn, and ragged were they; they hardly knew him, so radiant was the halo of hope and love around his once devil-may-care face; so earnest, so grave, yet so joyous had become his once flippant, reckless mien. Yet, in their very greeting, Ray well knew that deep and faithful as had been the old trust, there was new born from the harsh ordeal of this strange, sad summer a friendship firmer, deeper, than ever earthly menace could shake—a trust and loyalty that was registered in heaven. Not one word for hours was interchanged between Jack and Ray as to that scene in which he carried to Grace the letter Gleason had stolen, or found. Together, with Blake occasionally injecting his rattling comments, they talked over all the sea of troubles through which he had passed, and together they would have mourned it all anew but for Ray.

"No, major. No, Jack. I see well that it was all for the best. God knows I have been ten times rewarded for anything I may have suffered then. There was a lesson I *had* to learn, and did learn: that there are hundreds of people who think that when a man drinks at all there is no crime that may not properly be lodged at his door. It *has* been a hard siege, but every hour has been inestimable in result and in reward."

But before they rolled in their blankets that night

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Truscott looked him in the eyes one moment, then held out his hand.

"Is it necessary for me to say how I value what you did and bore for Grace and me, Billy?"

"Not a word, Jack."

Then came the march to meet the regiment, the royal, ringing welcome, a day devoted to lionizing Ray, greeting the new officers, choosing horses, assigning recruits to companies, and then a dash down the Cheyenne, a week's ride in the glad October sunshine, and, one brilliant evening as they returned, heading in toward the agencies, there met them the courier with despatches and letters, and Ray's heart went bounding up into his throat as four dainty envelopes, all addressed in the same hand, were lifted up to him as he sat on Dandy, and then Jack Truscott came riding quickly to his side, his eyes glowing, though wet with emotion, his lips compressed, yet a world of joy and gratitude shining in his face. Ray looked up eagerly, and their hands clasped.

"I have a son, Billy, and all is well,—thank God!"

And then came the day when with the long skirmish lines deployed, far as eye could see, the —th, with the comrade battalions of the other regiments that had shared the rigors of the Yellowstone campaign of '76, came sweeping over the open prairies from the north, and whirling in ahead of them the sullen, scowling, blanketed bands of old Machpealota; "herding" them up the valley of the White River towards the agency, and penning them between the glistening crags of Dancer's Butte and the barrier bluffs on the other side, while MacKenzie's troopers, trim and fresh in their

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natty garrison dress, "rounded them up" from the south and west, and by night the work of disarming and dismounting the silent Indians was begun. New forces were all there ready to take the field against the hordes of Cheyennes still lurking in the mountains; but for the —th the campaign of the centennial year was virtually over. A few days of rest and jubilee and greeting of old and new friends among the regiments there assembled, and then they turned their horses' heads southward, gave one backward look at the valley where they turned the tables on the Cheyennes, where Wayne had so nearly sacrificed his whole command, where Ray had run the gauntlet of death by torture to save them, where Truscott's night dash to the rescue had brought him charging just in time, and over the rolling prairies they marched to seek far to the south their winter homes.

Thither had Ray and Truscott already gone. The summer's work was done. The campaign was ended, and there came by telegraph from Cheyenne a notification that Lieutenant Ray would be needed as a witness on the trial of the owners of that gambling-den in which the soldier Wolf had been done to death. The "Gray Fox" was sending in his ambulance and a staff-officer at that very moment. He sent for Ray to bid him good-by and offer him the welcome lift. And just as Truscott was writing some hurried lines to Grace, cheering her with the news that in two weeks he could reach her, the colonel laid a quiet hand upon his shoulder,—an unusual demonstration, and one that meant a good deal,—and said, "It has occurred to the general that you might like to go ahead with Ray, captain; he

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appreciates the circumstances under which you hurried to join us, and thinks that now Mrs. Truscott is entitled to claim you, so Mr. Billings will send your orders after you by mail." He did not say that he had himself gone to the general to ask this indulgence for Truscott, but so it happened that long before sundown the three old comrades, Truscott, Ray, and Mr. Bright, of the staff, were whirling ahead towards Laramie, and that the precious inmates of number eleven at Russell were electrified by the news that Jack and Will,—"Jack and Will!" would be there ten days ahead of the anticipated time.

A blessed ten days they were. Grace and Baby Truscott were in readiness to welcome paterfamilias long before Mrs. Stannard, like sister Anne on the watch-tower, reported the cloud of dust that told of the coming of the Laramie stage, and when that grimy vehicle finally drew up at the gate, and two eager warriors sprang out (maybe there were not dozens of watching eyes along the row!), there was Maid Marion down the walk with a troop of the garrison children flocking about her, and Mrs. Stannard (by special arrangement and request) was awaiting them on the piazza; and when Jack, after very brief and hearty greeting, was passed on into the house and up the stairs, and into the hands of that awesome potentate in petticoats before whom from the moment of their entry into this world of troubles all men must bow in helpless submission—the monthly nurse, and the bronzed and bearded and somewhat haggard soldier meekly surrendered himself into her custody, and was ushered by her into a little room, where he was bidden to make himself as civil-

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ized as possible in appearance, lest his war-worn guise should shock mamma and frighten baby into convulsions, he obeyed in silence, nay, even with propitiatory smiles and gestures. Ay, lay down your arms and bend the suppliant knee, sheathe your useless sword, and hush to soothing whisper the voice that thundered in command a week agone; hide away with noiseless hand the heavy boot and clinking spur; off with belt and buckle and scratching shoulder-strap, and don your softest dressing-gown and creakless slipper; submit to search for pins and needles you never carried; promise you will only talk just so much, and stay only just so long, and will sit only just in such a place and won't attempt to agitate her, "for we must still be very, very careful," and at last you are admitted, and you kneel by the white bed and hear the rapturous ecstasy of welcome in her faint voice, and read of her sacred martyrdom in the white cheek and fragile hand, and glory in the pride and joy of that wondering, wonderful mother-look in the great, deep, lustrous eyes, and kiss again the warm, sweet lips that are heaven's nectar to the thirst of yours; and then—and then there is revealed to you that little, wrinkled, ruddy head, all folds and puckers and creases, all the redder and uglier for contrast with the snowy bosom in which it twists and burrows, and those expressionless, saucer-blue, liquid, blinking little eyes, and tiny upturned nose, and puckering, gurgling, querulous mouth,—all that is visible from the folds of the white blanket worn as only Indian and baby *can* wear one; and you are bidden to declare that he is the very, very image of you, bless his honeyed lips! and then you must take him one

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minute,—nurse must let her see Jack with his baby boy in his arms!—and though fearful, you assent, and with reverent, prayerful gratitude, you receive your first-born to your heart, and thank God for the infinite mercy that has brought her, the sweet young wife and mother, through her deadly peril, and then you would kiss the helpless, staring, blinking, little blanket-framed face; but at first touch of those bristling moustaches a powerful spasm has convulsed the tiny features, and a vehement, plaintive, wailing protest bursts from the contorted lips, and then your son and heir is snatched away, and you stand like convicted felon, while nursey dandles and tosses and condoles and condones and cuddles. "Well, well, well, *did* it nearly fighten its pessus, pessus life out with its horrid, awful, uggy beard? Well, it never, never sall aden, *never!* No, nursey wouldn't let it." That's it, Jack; sit down and make the best of it. Your reign as lord and master is over and done with. Lo! Baby is king, and Mrs. Muggins is his prime minister!

But, down in the pretty parlor, the returning soldier is still master of the situation. Thank heaven for the beneficence which surrounds the birth of love with the supervisory ministration of no meddling old woman! Were it otherwise, the ancient and honorable profession of which Mrs. Sairy Gamp is the faithful exponent would never have been called into being. Ray and Mrs. Stannard were exchanging rapturous "so glad to see you's" and shaking hands, and giving and receiving news about all manner of people, while Marion Sanford was still some distance "down the row" with the romping group of youngsters, and chatting briskly

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with Mrs. Wilkins and some of the infantry ladies for all the world as though Ray were nowhere within a thousand miles. She wanted to keep faith with the children, she said, and they made too much noise for Baby's slumbers when playing about the house. Of course she looked, as did the other ladies, all eagerness to see the returning officers, and was quite prepared to parry all thrusts which were certain to come,—all the deft insinuations which people are so practised in giving under certain suspected circumstances. Of course that moonlit interview the night of the hop had been seen by more than one, and told to more than a dozen, though Ray had kept between her and the couples that happened to be on the gallery, and so concealed the sweet *dénouement*, and his subsequent devotions that night to Mrs. Turner and to Miss Whaling had completely bewildered them. For her sake, he had written, the matter should be so managed as to subject her to as little questioning as possible. It was already arranged that she would be returning Eastward about the time the regiment got fairly settled in winter quarters. Already the infantry were packing up and shipping their goods and chattels to their new posts, and it was just barely possible that, with a little dissembling and apparent indifference, the train of talk might be thrown from the track. Mrs. Stannard's blue eyes danced merrily as she welcomed Ray, and they gave one quick glance towards her that he might know where "she" was, and it was then arranged that he was to return to the house with certain letters as soon as he could unpack his valise and change his dress. By that time, too, Miss Sanford was recalled by a message from

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Grace, and so when Ray reappeared and the servant ushered him into the cool, darkened little parlor, and scurried away to the kitchen to exchange confidences with cook, he had seen and spoken to all the ladies of the regiment, and given them news of their lords, and had not yet exchanged one word with the lady of his love. For a moment he stood there, looking around at the familiar and dainty objects in the room which he had pictured in his mind's eye a million times in that brief month; at the piano,—closed and unused of late; at the pictures and statuettes, and the quaint little odds and ends in the way of "what-nots," book-stands, tables, and chairs; at the broad and inviting lounge with its beautiful covering and soft pillows, and the bear-skin rugs at the foot; at the rich silk and bamboo screen of Japanese handiwork that kept the chilling draught from the piano or work-table when the ladies were there, and was big enough to form a complete enclosure about them,—their "corral" he had termed it,—and, *was* that her footstep on the floor above? No! Too heavy and slow. The maid had just gone up with the mail; besides, her room—*Her* room was now on the ground-floor, off the dining-room. Why *didn't* she come? She must know how hard all this assumed indifference was to bear. She must know how eager he was to look once more into her sweet blue eyes and read their shy welcome; she must know how his arms longed to enfold her. His eyes were growing more accustomed to the curtained light, and he could see his own reflection in the mirror between the windows, and noted with natural satisfaction how bronzed and "serviceable" he was looking again, and then he thought it

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would be a good plan to draw that screen across the end of the piano and hide behind it, and watch *her* as she came in, before rushing forth to—well, wait a moment! *Would* she be quite prepared for so rapturous a greeting as he longed to give her? Eyes and lips and arms and breast were yearning for her, but, would she not be abashed at such a demonstration? It would serve her right for keeping him waiting, and he took hold of the screen to draw it towards him, and the screen unaccountably resisted. He dropped on his knee to loosen the foot from a supposed catch in the heavy rug, and gave a stronger pull and away it came, —and there like Lady Teazle, only all sweet smiles and welcome and blushes and shy delight, a lovely, winsome picture of loving womanhood, crouched bonny Maid Marion.

"Maidie! Oh, you darling! you delight!" And his arms were about her in an instant. He sprang to his feet, and, despite attempted resistance and retreat, she was clasped to his heart, and held there,—held there close and strong: held there so firmly that she could not get away, and so, in default of other hiding-place, her face was buried on his breast, and—well, she had to put her arms *somewhere*. When does a woman look so like a stick as when her own arms hang straight down by her side while a lover's are twining about her? If you need confirmation of this startling theory, mademoiselle, simply take one look at that otherwise delightful picture "At last—Alone." Observe the ardor of the lover-husband; note the unresponsive droopiness of the charmingly attired bride, and defend the straight-up-and-down hang of that use-

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less arm if you can. She might, at least, take the stiffness or limpness out of it by simply placing the little hand on his shoulder, and that is just what Marion did, until—until he himself seized and drew it around his neck. The question as to how he should greet her had, somehow, solved itself.

At last he raised her head. She was indistinctly murmuring something.

"Pardon me, Miss Blue-Eyes; but—to whom did you speak?"

"To you; I said that, if all the same to you, I would like to look at you."

"And what did I hear you call me?"

"I said—Mr. Ray."

"*Mr.* Ray! Are you aware of the fact that Mr. Ray is quite a thing of the past? very, very far in the past," he added, with deep and earnest feeling in place of the playful tone of the previous words. "I have been Ray or Mr. Ray, or Billy Ray and 'that scamp Ray,' many a long year. Only one woman on earth called me always by the one name I strove to teach you, Maidie, and that was—mother. Am I not yet 'Will' to you?"

A moment's silence, a moment's hesitation, and then, with blushing cheeks and beaming eyes, bravely, loyally, comes the answer: "Yes! In every thought, in every moment, only—it was not quite so easy to say."

"And now, if I forgive you, will you tell me, since you have had the look you demanded, just what it was you wanted to see in such a sun-tanned specimen? What is there to warrant such flattering notice, Maidie mine?"

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She was looking up at him with such a halo of hope and love and pride and trust shining about her exquisite face; she stood there with one soft little hand resting on his shoulder, while the other shyly plucked at the tiny knot of dark-blue ribbon on his breast,—the ribbon that had fastened her daisy to his scouting-shirt. He had relaxed the pressure of his arms, but they still enfolded her, and he looked the picture of brave young manhood blessed with the sweetest knowledge earth can give. Two big tears seemed starting from the blue depths of those shining eyes. He bent fondly towards her.

"What is it, sweet one? tell me."

"I had been thinking of all you had written me of your past, and of all your troubles and wrongs this summer, and wondering—wondering how any one could think of the loyalty you had always shown to those you loved,—how any one could look into your eyes and say you would ever disappoint—my faith."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A CAVALRY WEDDING.

AND now the —th were all in from the field, and the wives and families of those officers who were there to be stationed were arriving by every train, and the post was all bustle and confusion and rejoicing. Some changes had occurred, as had been predicted by the colo-

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nel, but many of our old friends and several of later date were ensconced within the homely walls, and preparing for the combined rigors and comforts of a Wyoming winter in garrison. Here again were old Stannard and his loyal, radiant wife: here were the Turners and Raymonds and Webbs and Waynes and Truscotts and Heaths and Freemans, and others of whom we have not heard, and stanch old Bucketts, the sorely badgered but imperturbable quartermaster, and Billings, the peppery adjutant, and Mrs. Billings (whom their next-door neighbor Mr. Blake epitomized forthwith, to the lady's vehement indignation, as Billings and Cooings), and Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins and the little Wilkinses, and a "raft of youngsters," as the junior bachelor officers were termed, and with Blake was his sworn friend and ally Billy Ray, now the senior lieutenant of the regiment. Life was gayety to all but him, for Marion—the light of his very existence—had returned to the East. For ten days before the arrival of the regiment Russell was paradise. There were long, joyous, exquisite interviews in the dear little parlor at the Truscotts'. There were rides and drives over the boundless prairie; there were plannings and promises, and—I fear for once in his life Ray felt no great joy in the arrival of the old regiment, for on that day Major Taylor's family went East for the winter, and under their escort Miss Sanford departed. Bright and gay as was the winter that followed to all the ladies and most of the officers, there was one fellow at least to whom hops and dinners and germans had faint attraction. Routine duty at a cavalry post soon palls on the most enthusiastic. The endless round of roll-calls,

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stables both morning and evening, of drills and guard-mount, boards of survey and garrison courts, recitations and rifle-practice,—all serve to keep up constant demands on time and attention. There is just one thing that will throw about them all a halo of romance and interest,—the presence at the garrison of the girl you love; and when such a blessing has once been enjoyed and then is suddenly taken away, the utter blank is beyond description. Only to a few has it happened that the love of their lives has been found in garrison, and only they will quite realize what life at Russell became to Ray after Marion Sanford went East. He had greatly changed as every one saw. Not that he was less buoyant and brave, but that he was far more thoughtful, grave, and earnest. He was exact and punctilious in the performance of every military duty, was always ready to "bear a hand" at the entertainments and parties, but the haunts where he had once reigned supreme knew him no more. The post trader was heard regretfully to remark that Ray wasn't half the man he expected to find him, and there were rattlepates among the youngsters in the regiment to whom "Ray's reformation" was a source of outspoken regret. "If that's the effect of getting all over in love," said Mr. Hunter, "I don't want any of it in mine."

Poker, too, languished as a popular pastime; the demand for morning cocktails had unaccountably fallen off; the bar-keeper would fall asleep at the club-room from sheer lack of employment during the afternoons and early evenings, for many of the married ladies had brought maiden relatives or friends to spend the winter with them, and half a dozen new romances were start-

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ing; and the colonel had his eye on some of the old *habitués* of "the store," and Wilkins and Crane and one or two other formerly reliable patrons were kept too busy to spend time or money at that once seductive retreat, and with the injustice of embittered human nature it was their wont to ascribe it all to Ray's backsliding, a matter of which that young gentleman was for some time in ignorance. He spent his off-duty hours in writing or reading or long chats with Truscott and romps with Baby Jack; he always dined with them on Sunday, and was in and out between their house, the Stannards', and "Saint's Rest" (as Blake had named the bachelor ranch which he and Ray occupied in partnership) at all hours of the day or evening; he was properly attentive at the colonel's, and called frequently upon the young ladies visiting the Waynes' and Heaths' and Billings' (Mrs. Turner never would have young ladies with her, they were too distracting), and of course he was subjected to incessant queries about Miss Sanford. It was too absurd to deny the engagement, said the garrison, for everybody knew he wrote regularly and she answered. Nevertheless, Ray, Truscott, Stannard, and, of course, Mrs. Truscott and Mrs. Stannard, denied that any engagement existed. Ray and Marion had quietly decided, as has been indicated, that there should be none, until—until he could offer her a little army home. But denials only stimulated the womenfolk into hazarding ingenious questions and suggestions, and the men to various conjectures more or less wooden-headed. At first it was theorized that he had proposed and been rejected; that was disposed of by her frequent letters. Then that "she had him on

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probation," and would marry him if he could keep clear of the old temptations a year,—two years or so,—unless some fellow came along meantime and swept her off. Bets were hazarded on the different events, and there was no end of talk about it, and Ray was the object of much sentimental interest among the ladies. One thing, however, was clearly observable. They, the ladies, with the confiding, caressing, insinuating, and delicious impertinence of the sex, could and would hazard their suggestions to him in person, and were laughingly parried; but if any one among the men were ass enough to suppose that *all* the old Ray had vanished he had only just to attempt to be jocularly familiar or inquisitive with him on that or a kindred subject, and get a Kentucky kick, as Blake called Ray's snubs, that would make him red in the face for a week. Poor Crane was the victim of the final experiment, and it was his last attempt to be facetious for many a weary month. It was a snapping December morning, one of the Advent Sundays, Truscott was officer of the day, and Ray had escorted Mrs. Truscott to church in town, and it so happened that a number of officers were in the club-room (for the colonel and Billings had gone away to North Platte on a court-martial, and the major did not care to haul in on the reins while the chief was absent), and looking out on the wintry prairie as they came driving into the garrison. There was some little sly comment, thoroughly good-natured, over the metamorphosis which a year had made in Ray, when suddenly the door opened and he bounded in.

"Give me a flask of good brandy, Muldoon; our driver is almost frozen."

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Of course there was a ripple of laughing chaff over the unchristian spirit which prompted people to search the Scriptures in such weather and freeze the helpless victims of their piety,—the drivers. All this Ray parried in his old jaunty way, his white teeth gleaming and his eyes twinkling with merriment over some unusually good hit; but as ill luck would have it Mr. Crane had been up too late or too early—or both—and had managed to drink more than was prudent. He had always smarted under the scoring Ray had given him in Arizona, and he saw, or murkily thought he saw, a chance to say a stinging thing. The bar-keeper had just wrapped the flask in paper and was handing it to Ray, when Crane thickly began,—

"Makes a heap of difference in a man this gettin' spooney, don't it? Year ago Ray would have sneered at fellow's going to church, an' now he's doin' it—self. Next thing, by George, he'll be havin' 'ligious scruples 'bout goin' Indian-fighting."

There were sharp, sudden growls of "Shut up, you idiot!" "Choke him off, somebody!" but all too late. Ray heard every word of it, and his eyes blazed in an instant. Every man saw the coming storm, and there was an awkward rising from chairs and gathering about Crane as though to hustle him out of the room. For a moment Ray stood there quivering with wrath, seemingly making strong effort at self-control, then, with the old ring and snap to every word, he first sent the bar-keeper out of the room, telling him to take the flask at once to his quarters, then turned quickly on Crane, who was stupidly shuffling at a pack of cards.

"This is the third time, Mr. Crane, that you have

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made it necessary for me to bring you up with a round turn. You intimate that a year ago I would have sneered at a man's going to church. Never, sir, in my whole life has man or woman, boy or girl, heard from my lips one word of ridicule or disrespect for religious faith or religious observances. You are in no condition to-day to appreciate what I say, perhaps, so you may have until to-morrow for complete apology and retraction; but this much you *can* understand, sir: if you fancy for one instant that religious scruples, or any other kind, will interfere with my fighting now or at any time, you are most damnably mistaken, sir, as you will find as soon as you are sober enough to receive a message." And with that he turned and left the room. The next morning Blake was out with a note, as everybody knew would be the result, and poor Crane tied a wet towel around his head and sent for Wilkins and Heath and others, and they all told him the same thing. He had made an outrageous ass of himself, and had best write a full apology,—and he did. It was "the church militant," said Blake, "that Billy joined," and it was evident enough that the chip was still there on Ray's shoulder. Even Marion Sanford's sunny head had not displaced it.

And then came a time in the spring when Ray's letters began to be very frequent, and Rallston's big fist sprawled in on all manner of envelopes from all manner of Iowa and Nebraska hotels. He was doing a lively business in the horse and cattle trade again, had quit gambling, said rumor, and Mrs. Rallston was with him now on all his journeyings, and looking marvellously well and happy; and along in April Blake and

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Ray were doing all they knew how, with Mrs. Stannard's assistance, to make their quarters habitable for lady's use, and Rallston and Nell came and paid them a visit of an entire week, and went away enraptured with the regiment. Rallston was ill at ease at first, but his wife's grace and beauty, the fact that she was Ray's sister, and that Mrs. Stannard and Mrs. Truscott became devoted to her from the start, and that "old Stannard" and Truscott took Rallston under their protecting wings, and showed him around as though there had never been a flaw in his record,—all these things and his natural good nature combined to make him popular among the officers, and the night before they left he had the whole crowd in at a "stag party" in town, whereat there was much conviviality and good feeling; and the next thing whispered about the garrison was that Ray had "an interest in the business," for when Billings wanted a new horse, and could find none just to suit him in the stables, he sought Ray's advice, as he always did in such matters (the cloud between them had long since drifted away, but not until Billings had "made a clean breast of it"), and Ray told him to wait a few days and the horse to suit him would be there, and he could take his own time in paying for him, too. (He did, by the way.) And when May came, and with it orders for a summer camp, Ray's old troop took the field without him. Another vacancy had occurred, and Rallston sent three baskets of champagne from Omaha that all might drink the health of the new captain, whose troop was down the road at Sidney. Verily, Fortune was smiling on the gallant fellow on whom she had seemed to frown.

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Even the course of true love was defying all previous record, and had run with exceptional smoothness. Barring the one fearful task of having to write to her father, his courtship had been sweet and unimpeded as all its first surroundings had been bitter. And now, free, hopeful, redeemed, what was there to wait for? Why not claim his bride and a long leave of absence, and take her with him to see the dear old mother in Kentucky? "The engagement is at last announced," wrote Grace to Truscott, who was scouting over the Big Horn, "and the wedding will be some time this summer. Was it not odd that you and he should each have received promotion just before marrying? Little did dear Maidie and I ever dream in the old days at Madame Reichard's that we were to marry captains of cavalry in the same regiment. Oh, Jack! why *didn't* I have a military wedding? Marion says that the entire community is so shocked at the idea of her accepting an unknown army officer that she has determined to have a brilliant affair of it, and Mr. Sanford says that she shall have everything she wants that money can buy, and they say he is 'rolling in wealth' now. His wife has been behaving like an angel ever since Marion's return, and, much to the Zabriskies' disappointment, the reception will be at the Sanfords', and she will be married from there and the whole clan will be gathered to see it, and there will be eight bridesmaids, three of whom were our classmates at school, and, of course, the wedding itself will be in the old cathedral church, and all the officers there in full dress and the band from Governor's Island. Oh, Jack! can't we go back and do it all over again? Marion

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says there is only one thing to mar her happiness: she cannot have cavalry officers for groomsmen because almost all Mr.—Captain Ray's (there I go making the same blunder that used to exasperate me so in Mrs. Turner last year: she *would* speak of you as *Mister* long after you were captain, only I knew she did it on purpose)—*Captain* Ray's friends are in the field and cannot be spared, but Mr. Blake is to be best man, and there will be plenty of other officers. Marion says that at first her father looked very, very solemn at the idea of her falling in love with a cavalry officer, and could not be reconciled to it, but one evening he came home late from New York,—he had been at a dinner at the Union Club, and there was introduced to General S——, who sat next him, and in some way he asked about Mr. Ray, and the general said there wasn't a braver man or finer officer in the cavalry, and spoke of him in such a glowing way that Mr. Sanford came home radiant. Well, excepting my Jack, the general was right." And Jack's answer was that he thought it would be an excellent plan for Mrs. Grace to take Baby Jack and a "two months' leave," and go East and exhibit her glory and delight to grandpapa and grandmamma, and see Marion married. Mrs. Stannard was to start by June 30,—why not go with her? The California mining venture—his old Arizona investment—would fully warrant the extravagance. Many a woman will refrain from attending the gayest of balls because her Strephon cannot be there, but where is the woman who can resist a wedding? Grace went, as a matter of course.

What pen can describe the sensation that had shaken

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society to its foundation when it began to leak out that the lovely Miss Sanford, eldest daughter of the Honorable Blank Sanford,—plutocrat,—was going to marry an army officer? This, then, was the reason why swains from Philadelphia and New York had sighed in vain all that winter. Ever since November she had been the acknowledged belle, frank, joyous, radiant, gracious, winning, a woman all men worshipped and all women envied. "I wish I could find something in her to criticise," was the despairing summary of a would-be rival. "She is so courteous, so considerate, so generous, so hopelessly regardful of everybody else's rights and feelings. *I* don't think she's a radiant beauty. You cannot but see defects in her features, but who ever saw a more winning face? I don't wonder everybody, old and young, is simply fascinated by her. I watched her there all last evening when they had that little party. She was surrounded every moment. She was having the best kind of time, but her eyes were everywhere watching to see that everybody was entertained, and no sooner was a woman left alone for an instant than she was by her side with a gracious word—or a man. It is so everywhere she goes. Now, who on earth can this officer be? What's an officer like, anyhow?"

It was no isolated opinion. Marion Sanford was a marked woman in general society, a woman who reigned, queenlike, over every heart; but, among the circle of her relatives, the uncles and aunts and cousins who lived within the sphere of her attractions, she was held to be little less than the angels. It made it all the harder for Ray, since everybody was eager to see what

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manner of man it was that had won so peerless a pearl from their midst. It was loyalty to him, pride in him, love for him more than anything else, that made her choose a military wedding, that all at home might see something of the brighter side of army life and the social attractions of the men who were his chosen comrades.

And at last it comes: a day of cloudless sunshine, of soft and balmy air, heralding a moonlit evening that could have served for the Midsummer Night's Dream, and inspired the melodies of Mendelssohn; and the massive walls of a great cathedral church are silvered by the rays without, and pierced by the brilliant flood of colored light shining from within. Carriage after carriage rolls up through the dense throng of curious but silent spectators and discharges its load of richly-dressed occupants through the carpeted, canvas-roofed lane of belted police, through the massive portals of the church, past the welcoming "masters of ceremonies,"—two society swells, who know everybody and where everybody is to be seated,—and by them are presented to one of half a dozen stalwart young officers in all the glitter of shoulder-knots, helmet-cords, aiguillettes, sabres, and belts, and these martial ushers receive the wondering ladies on their arms and escort them with much ceremony to the designated pews, wherein they are deposited with the precision of military bows, and the escort returns forthwith, clanking down the aisle followed by curious eyes. Carriage after carriage arrives, party after party is ushered in with the same unerring ease, just as the staff-officers conduct detachments to their assigned positions: no break, no

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confusion; and the good people of the peace-loving metropolis, to whom army matters have long been a dark and uninviting mystery, begin to admit that there are some points worth noting in a military wedding. And then "society" begins to recognize each other with nods and smiles and fluttering fans, and to look about and take mental inventory of the marvellous changes in the vast interior. Verily, Marion Sanford's circle of friends and relatives has effected transformation here! Back of the congregation the organ-loft is concealed from view by ornamental screen-work and an arbor-like arrangement of vines and leaves, from which the gilded pipes and gothic spires shoot up into the vaulted ceiling; but no one knows who or what may be there concealed. Towards the altar the church is a bower of beauty. Immediately in front of the chancel rail and facing inward towards the centre aisle are the elevated seats of the choristers, with the pulpit and lectern on opposite sides and at the outer edge of the choir-stalls. The pulpit and lectern themselves are a creamy mass of daisies,—Marion's own flower,—while between them stretches a light trellis-work, half concealing, half disclosing, the choir-stalls beyond, twined with smilax, and thickly studded with white roses and carnations. Over the centre aisle this trellis takes the form of an exquisite floral arch, spanning the steps to the choir-level and the broad aisle beyond. All the pillars are twined with smilax; all the chancel rail is similarly decked, while roses, carnations, and "snow-balls" are everywhere. Each side of the altar is ornamented by tall pyramidal groups of palms and tropical plants, while the upper portion of the church is filled

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here and there and everywhere with foliage and blossoms. A great marriage-bell of carnations hangs over the altar steps; the altar itself is one mass of daisies; the air is heavy with perfume and now, as eight o'clock approaches, rich with soft, exquisite melody that comes floating from an unseen orchestra in the loft. Every now and then there is unusual flutter and curiosity as the ushers stride up the aisle with comrades in full uniform, who, with their wives, are "army guests," and they are escorted to the seats just back of the choristers, among the relatives and nearest friends, where they are placed half facing the crowded assemblage, and are at once the object of hundreds of curious eyes. There are the bald head and red face of old Colonel Pelham and the majestic proportions of his much-better-half, who, as scion of all the De Ruyters, is quite at home confronting the social battery; and Mrs. Stannard with her happy blue eyes and noble bearing, and Mrs. Truscott, exquisitely dressed and an object of no little admiration among observers of both sexes. "Old Stannard" fidgets at the unaccustomed harness of full uniform, and kicks impatiently at his sabre, wishing himself out on the Arizona deserts again, but defiantly determined to hold his own and glare the people down. Men of the artillery and engineers, too, are ushered into their seats, and then everybody seems to be settled; it lacks but two minutes of eight by the watch, and a military wedding must be of all things on time. Suppressed excitement can be heard without. The doors leading into the vestibule are closed. Everybody is staring back at the church entrance, and still the sacristy door remains firmly shut. Surely 'tis time for the groom

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and his best man to appear there; one minute of eight and no sign. Who in all that crowd could dream that Ray and Blake have vainly stormed the vestry door and found it locked? By some unaccountable error the sexton has barred their entrance as well as that of the intrusive uninvited whom he meant to exclude.

"What on earth shall we do, Billy?" quoth Blake. "I can heave a brick through the window and crawl in after it. It will ruin our uniforms, but we'll get there on time."

"Back to the front!" says Ray, pardonably white and tremulous. "We can scurry up the side-aisle. It's our only chance now!" So back they go, and the next instant the vestibule door opens just a few inches, the congregation rises to a—woman, and two slim-built fellows in full cavalry uniform, the long yellow plumes of their carried helmets floating behind them and their sabres clattering, hasten up to the head of the church just as the tower clock booms the first stroke of eight. Organ, orchestra, and ringing voices burst into triumphant melody, the vestibule doors fly open, and, headed by the crucifer and his sacred emblem, the white surpliced choristers come thronging up the centre aisle, while the whole congregation turns and faces them, as wedding congregations will, and the lofty rafters ring with the exultant strains,—

"Hark! hark, my soul! Angelic songs are swelling."

Slowly, reverently, they move up through the broad lane, flanked by eager faces; the choristers are followed by the brilliant party of ushers,—soldier and civilian,—

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the gray-haired father and his handsome wife; then come the fair bridesmaids, two and two, all in fleecy silk, and bearing dainty bouquets of daisies tied with the cavalry colors, while between the last two, sister and cousin, and as though led by them, veiled, and with downcast eyes, a matchless picture of sweet womanly grace and beauty, is Marion.

The choristers file to their places, the father with the lady of his name halts at the archway, stepping to one side that the ushers and bridesmaids may move on to the altar, which they encircle right and left; Ray, pale and white, but with eager light in his handsome dark eyes, steps quickly down, with Blake close at his heels, and bowing low, meets his fair bride at the arch, then turns and faces the two white-robed clergymen who come forward from the chancel, leaving the venerable bishop at the holy altar. The swelling hymn has ceased, and in its place low, sweet, witching strains of music float through the vaulted sanctuary; a hush as of intense expectation falls upon the listening throng, and the deep voice of the rector is heard in the solemn opening exhortation,—"Reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God." *Is* it fancy? or, as that never-answered challenge comes: "If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together?" *does* Ray throw back his head with something of that same old semi-defiant gesture that as much as says it wouldn't be a safe thing for any man to try? And then another voice is heard, feeble, tremulous with years, ay, with deep emotion; it is that of the revered old soldier of the Cross, whose lips long years before propounded the same solemn query to her

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sainted mother; who under that same roof received this child, a smiling baby-girl, into the congregation of Christ's flock, and signed her with the sign of the cross; who led her, a sweet maiden, to the altar there beyond to renew the solemn promise and vow that was there made in her name; from whose hands she had on bended knee so often received the consecrated elements; whose aging accents had trembled in grief and sympathy even as they uttered the words of solace, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord," and whose consolation was sweetest to her in the bitter days when that blessed mother died. No wonder Ray can feel that she is trembling from head to foot, and that his "I will" is firm and strong as he looks squarely into the eyes of the venerable priest and honors him for the gathering tears he sees there; no wonder his own turn proudly, fondly, down on her as her soft hand is placed in his nervous palm, and Blake sets his teeth to repel the gasp of delight with which he hears the clear-cut enunciation of every word of his solemn troth. For the life of him he cannot help thinking how many a time he has heard that voice in the wild days on the frontier, in Indian battle or in garrison debate, and marked the same ring of determination when he was deeply moved. "By gad, but he means it! I never knew him when he didn't mean every word he said!" he gasps to himself. And then—'tis her turn, and clear, bell-like, yet silvery soft, her sweet voice repeats the trembling words of her old pastor; and all over the great church men and women hold their breath and listen with eager ear; and eyes grow moist and throats grow lumpy, and some who love her dearly can hardly

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restrain a flood of tears, for never for an instant, from the first word to the last, do her eyes, glorious in their trust and faith, exquisite in hope and love and tenderness, falter from their fond, loyal gaze up into his. There is uncontrollable recourse to handkerchiefs, a rustle, and sensation throughout the crowded ranks of society as the last solemn word of her troth is spoken, and Blake thanks heaven that the organ tones grow perceptibly louder and more triumphant, and so does Ray, who would gladly balk that awful hurdle on which so many a poor fellow has floundered,—"With all my worldly goods I thee endow;" but he holds gallantly to the ring. He hardly knows that they are following the white-robed clergy forward to the altar now, and that there it is the bishop's voice that greets them; but despite the helmet and sabre that hang twixt him and her he is close by her side, and ere he knows it is kneeling there at the chancel rail and listening to the grandest, sweetest benediction in all the eloquent ritual of the church, and then—and then, he has risen and is gazing into the humid eyes of his wife.

Oh, with what triumph and joy the mingled tones of organ and orchestra burst into the exultant music of the Wedding March! How the lights dance and whirl! how overpowering is the perfume of rose, hyacinth, and carnation! He has blindly shaken hands with some one, but Marion takes his arm, and together they meet the thronging sea of faces and step blithely down the surpliced lane of choristers, down the archway stairs, down the broad and carpeted aisle between the batteries of smiles and tears, and after them comes Blake towering beside the first bridesmaid; come all

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the other damsels on the arms of their attendant cavaliers; and carriage doors are banging, and there is a merry chime resounding through the moonlit street, and away they drive to the handsome old home, with all its windows ablaze with light, and grounds with colored lanterns; and there in the great bay-window they take their stand, with the circling ranks of lovely bridesmaids and gallant groomsmen about them, and have time to note the lavish and beautiful decorations, for here, as at church, flowers are everywhere, and banks of daisies with the R. S. monogram in carnations, the crossed sabres of the —th, cavalry guidons, and the stars and stripes all tell of the work of loving hands and hearts. And such a picture as she makes as she stands there by his side! When, when was Marion half so lovely? Her rippling hair, her lustrous eyes, her pure complexion, her beaming, blissful smile, her winsome charm of manner that none could ever quite describe,—none could ever imitate! Her dress? Must I tell of that? True, madam, I bow in all meekness. No wedding description could be even tolerable, as you say, that ignored the bridal toilet. Why! therein, too, Marion shone forth in one of her quaintest, most original guises. *Such* a struggle as she had had with Madam Finnegan,—that autocrat of metropolitan *modistes!* "I will be no conventional bride," she declared; orange flowers she would not wear, but her veil was fastened by her own flower,—exquisite daisies in silver and gold filigree work; and the dress?—Madam vowed it would ruin her *prestige*,—that it was unheard of, impossible; that no bridal dress could be made low-necked and sleeveless; but Marion well knew the beauty

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of her neck and arms, and Ray had begged it should be so. Madam protested, but in vain; the low-cut, sleeveless corsage fitted closely to the lines of the lovely figure, and gleamed with pearl embroidered lace, while the front of the skirt was trimmed *en tablier* with the same, and a profusion of rich point-lace fell on either side from the waist to the bottom of the skirt. Soft, rich, creamy satin was the material, falling in long, straight, ample folds from the waist to the end of the train. Neither pearls nor diamonds would she wear. Not a gem is in her ears. Her one decoration is an exquisite daisy-chain or necklace,—a dainty and delicate piece of handiwork in gold and silver,—and this is Ray's present to his bride.

Of the hundreds invited to the church, only relatives, closest friends, and "the Army people" are bidden to the reception at the Sanfords'. The Army represent Ray's kindred, for the loving old mother had been growing too feeble of late to venture on the journey, and she had decided to await their coming to her at Lexington; and Nellie Rallston, who longed to be present, gave it up when her husband decided that his business would not permit him to be so far away at such a time, but as compensation, he told her to compute every dollar she thought the journey with all incidentals would have cost them, and to double it and send to Chicago for the loveliest present the money would buy as her own gift to Billy's wife. As for himself, he had already chosen his present,—the prettiest Kentucky saddle-horse that ever woman rode. It was his way of expressing his appreciation of what she had done for Dandy. And so it happened that in the

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big room up-stairs, where the presents are shown to the limited few who are bidden to the reception, Nell's beautiful bracelets are flanked by two photographs,—counterfeit presentments of a most shapely and knowing-looking little steed, yet unnamed,—with Mr. Rallston's congratulations and best wishes. There is no describing the many costly and beautiful gifts from the great circle of friends, relatives, and schoolmates. Papa's, too, is of eminent solidity, though flimsy paper is the medium, but there are some that cannot be passed over without remark. ' There is significance in them.

One is a worn iron horseshoe, framed and set in gold, backed with velvet, and surrounding an oval miniature of a horse and rider; the horse is the lithe-limbed sorrel, Dandy; the rider, in the broad-brimmed hat, the blue scouting-shirt, and Indian leggings, is Ray. Touch a spring at the base of the frame and the front flies open and reveals that this is but the enclosure, for within nestles an exquisite little Swiss watch and chain of daintiest workmanship, with the monogram M. S. in diamonds. The horseshoe bears this inscription: "From the officers and men of Wayne's squadron, —th U. S. Cavalry, in grateful remembrance of a deed of heroism which renders sacred to them the name of Ray." And there is a letter from Wayne, which says, "The shoe is one of the four your gallant husband stripped from Dandy's feet the night he braved death to bring us rescue. The other three are not to be had for love or money. My wife and children have one of them: the two companies that composed the command have each another, framed and inscribed over the first sergeant's

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door." (Marion had no present she was so eager every one should see as this.) Then there is a wonderful clock of curious workmanship with a musical chime of bells that is going to prove something of a white elephant in moving from one post to another out on the frontier, but Marion vows it shall never be left behind. It comes from the men of the captain's own troop, many of whom served under him in Arizona, and there's a letter signed by the whole company, from the first sergeant down to Private Zwinge, in which they send their loyalty and duty to the bride of the bravest officer and kindest friend soldier ever had, and Marion shows this to Grace with blithe, happy laughter. "*Now* talk to me about your Jack!" she says.

Ah, well! Smiles and tears are intermingled, as they must be even in the marriage feast. There are so many there to whom the bride recalls the gentle, winsome mother, only, never was seen on that young mother's face, even in her maiden days, such peace and joy as is in the bride's to-night. There is no long lingering over the reception. Society will be invited to some formal affairs of that kind when the happy couple return from their brief wedding-tour, and only a few magnates from abroad have to be shaken hands with. The immediate wedding-party are soon seated—twenty of them—at the great table in the dining-room, while all the guests are scattered about at little quartette affairs around the broad halls and conservatory, and the orchestra plays sweet strains from their perch on the enclosed piazza, and busy waiters fly to and fro, and soon the champagne-corks are popping and the rooms are ringing with mirth and merriment, and Ray and Marion, seated side by side

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at the head of the broad table, are bombarded with toasts and congratulations, and the laughter and applause grow incessant as the bridesmaids and groomsmen exchange the poetic "mottos" in the favors they find at their places, and no bridesmaid seems quite able to properly affix the little gold sabre that is nestling in the folds of her napkin: it takes a soldier's practised hand to fasten them in those dainty India silks; and every groomsman swears that no one but a woman can ever properly adjust the daisy, which, as a scarf-pin, is his reward for the evening's services; and some inspired fellow-citizen gracefully proposes the health of the hostess, and an eminent statesman present ponderously does likewise for the bride, although it was the fixed determination that there should be no formal speech-making; but Mr. Sanford happily comes to the rescue in a few remarks of unaccustomed humor, in which he sets the room in a roar by expressing his satisfaction at having married off one encumbrance, his modified rapture in the reflection that there were still two or three in the way of daughters and nieces whom he felt bound to similarly dispose of, his comfort in the sight of half a dozen such likely young officers as those present, and his hope that they wouldn't "fool away their time." This dispels anything like formality, and the next thing there is a health to the Army and shouts for Blake. He finds his long legs slowly, and comes to the scratch infinitely puzzled as to how he is to worry through, but all is merriment by this time, and fun and laughter reward his feeblest shots. He is understood to begin somewhat as follows:

"You ought not to expect me to respond for the

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Army. I can't speak for the ladies thereof because they never gave me a chance to practise (oh! slander!), and I can't drink for the men because they insist on doing it for themselves (another libel!). In fact, after being here five days as the guest of our hospitable friends at the club, I'm wondering how any one ever could see anything to drink to in the army. Life there is a fearful grind. In the lofty and inspired language of Canon Kingsley,—if not cannon, he was at least a big gun in ecclesiastical circles (oh!),—it is a life in which

'Men must shirk and women must sweep.'"

(Loud protestations.) "Indeed, if it were not for the ladies—God bless them!—we would have nothing but fighting in the field and stagnation at home; but, whenever they get to running things their way, it—it is just the reverse." (Shame! No! Wretch!) He vainly strives to rally under the fire of imprecation, but it is too late. The groomsmen are denouncing him, as he deserves to be, as a slanderer and recreant. Mr. Ferris and Mr. Waring spring to their feet to implore the assembly to reject any and all such statements as the emanations of an embittered, oft-rejected, and "subtle, perjured, false, disloyal man;" and poor Blake, who really wanted to wind up with an apostrophe to the crowning excellences of the bride, is driven to cover, a victim of his vicious propensity for burlesque. He has created illimitable merriment, however, and is to be infinitely congratulated on getting off so easily. And then the bride-cake is cut, and eager is the excitement over the search for the prophetic ring,

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and the blushing bridesmaid who gets it has plainly made a deep impression on the young artilleryman who is seated next her, and is accused of already wearing his colors in her cheeks; and then comes the dance, and the crash-covered floors are speedily alive with twinkling feet, and the bride's own set in the lanciers is surrounded by a throng of eager lookers-on. And Ray's color has come back to his bronzed cheeks, and he has looked so well, so infinitely happy, so proud and radiant all the evening, and yet so grave withal, so quiet and self-restrained. All men speak of the earnest feeling that is evident in his acceptance of the showered congratulations, and the army comrades who have been long separated from him wonder at the change that has come over the fellow they once called "Rattling Ray."

And Marion! Heaven's blessings never lighted a more exquisite face than is hers to-night! She is simply radiant, simply irresistible, for the girls hang about her to repeat their congratulations again and again, to win another kiss, to hear the winning, gracious accents of the voice that has so long charmed and enthralled them. Old and young, rich and poor, big and little, those kinsfolk, school-mates, and neighbors, especially the little ones who were her scholars in the Sunday-school, flock about her, watch her with fascinated eyes; and for every one she has sweet and gracious words and beaming smiles; she holds them to the last. The children troop about her as she is led away to change her bridal-dress for the journey. 'Tis approaching midnight and the "owl train" leaves within the hour; and they hang about the stairways waiting for her reappearance, and hover in mysterious fascina-

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tion about Captain Ray as he comes in his travelling suit of mufti, and wonder why he should discard his uniform and sword, and the carriage is now at the door, and great store of rice and old slippers are got in readiness, and presently down the broad stairway she comes, metamorphosed as to raiment, but radiant, winsome as ever; and they seize upon her and bear her off bodily into the great parlor, and throng about her and pull her this way, that way, every way, and kiss and maul and squeeze and rumple, and never seem to exhaust her infinite patience or their own extravagant capacity; but at last they begin to surge towards the door-way, and the bridesmaids hover in circle for the closing ceremony, and she tosses her bouquet to the ceiling amid shouts and scurry, and, marvel of marvels! it is captured by her of the rosy cheeks and dancing eyes who has already secured the ring and fascinated the artilleryman, and they reach the door, and Ray has squeezed out to the steps, and some of the emotional cousins have retreated sobbing to deserted nooks and corners about the house, and at last she comes forth and springs lightly down the stairs, and the rice rattles after her along the broad walk, and the groomsmen line the gate-way and usher her into the carriage, and stand there ready to volley them with old slippers, and Ray is just about springing in beside her, when down comes Blake with his seven-league strides, bearing a sobbing little sunny-haired maiden of seven in his arms.

"Hold on!" he shouts. "This is my little sweetheart, and she shan't be left out in the cold."

And Marion leans from the carriage, and Ray stands

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to one side, as the weeping little one holds out her arms.

"Oh, Miss Ma—wion, I haven't had one kiss. They all cwowded so, and I was the only one." And her sobs break forth afresh.

"My own little kitten!" she cries, as the child is seized and folded to her heart. "How could I have come away without seeing my baby scholar?" And the mite is hugged and kissed and comforted and sent back to Blake's strong arms, rapturous because she has had Queen Marion's last embrace, and then Ray springs to her side and the door slams, and the horses plunge, and away they drive amid a shower of blessings and old slippers; and they have gone a block before she notes his silence, and, turning, sees that his eyes are closed, that a tear is glistening on his bronzed cheek.

"Will,—husband," she whispers, lovingly, tenderly, half-reproachfully. "What is it?" And her little hand steals into his.

For a moment there is no reply. His arm is quickly thrown around her and she is drawn close to his breast; his lips are pressed to her forehead, but he utters no word.

At last she hears the answer,—

"My darling. I am wondering what I ever did to deserve one moment of your love. I am wondering what man *could* deserve—you; and, I—was praying God's guidance that I might never disappoint your trust."

It is many a long year since that bright summer. Men have come and men have gone. Vows have been

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made and vows and hearts together have been broken, and yet, some lives, though into each "some rain must fall," have been full of sunshine.

Only the other day there came Eastward a letter from a proud young matron,—still young despite the cares incidental to the possession of a lively brood, among whom there seems no higher ambition than to emulate the exploits of a certain Master Sandy Ray, who is in pristine knickerbockers and perennial mischief. "Jack says," writes this proud mamma, "that with all his pranks that blessed little rascal is his father all over, fearless, truthful, and generous, and Captain Ray fairly idolizes him. My Jack junior is a head taller and nearly two years older, but the two are inseparable, and it is a sight to see them 'going off scouting' on their Indian ponies. As for Marion, I believe she is the happiest woman in the army."

Well! Mrs. Truscott ought to know, and this goes far towards substantiation of Truscott's theory, that Marion's faith was given to a man who was loyal in every fibre of his being, tender as he was brave, steadfast as he was loving, and he loves her as such a woman deserves to be loved, tenderly, faithfully, and to

THE END.

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